

THE ANARCHO TOURIST REVIEW



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... a few people
passing through a brief period of time ...

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INTRODUCTORY NOTES

Clearly we are living in critical times. Even from abroad, it's clear to see that the election of Trump, coming as it does in the epicenter of Imperial power, signifies that we are at a major historical turning point. One might even say that the post-modern era is ending. All the beliefs and practices that we once presumed normal are dissolving and giving way to a social outlook that may previously have been dismissed as irrelevant.

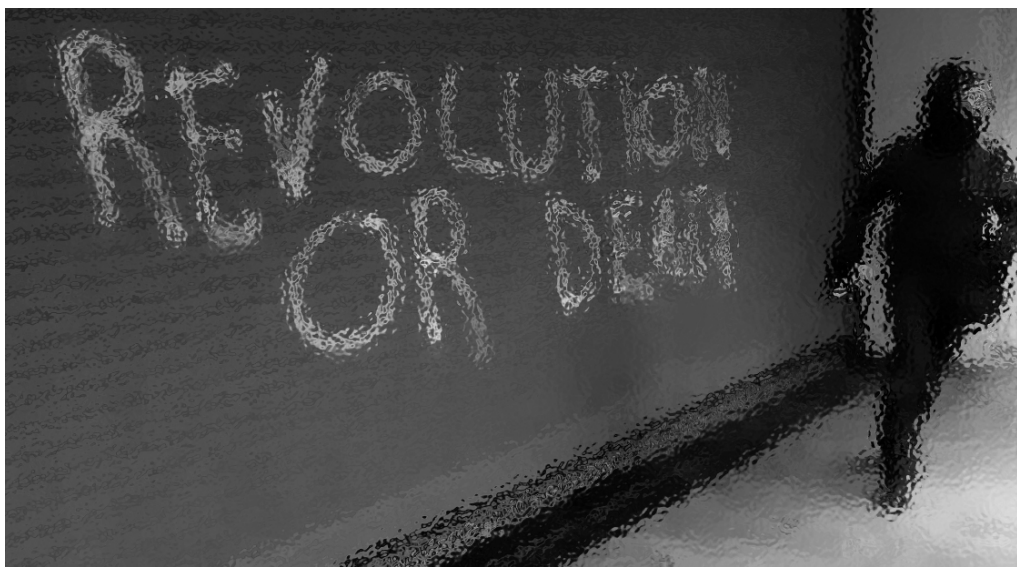
For one, Trump's victory totally stunned an impotent post-modern Left, but it did not really surprise any of us. To be honest, those who predicted otherwise were shocked, first and foremost, only with how out of touch they were with social reality. This is the first time in recent memory that a Western superpower has elected a head of state that represents such a clear departure from the politics of 'business as usual', even though this new direction is doubtlessly towards something quite foreboding. What is now undeniable is that, rather than going with a more conventional option, people are evidently calling for something much crazier.

On top of this, the rise of Trump is only one of the many symptoms of an era that seems to be defined, more than ever, by the slow-motion collapse of civilization in general. The wars are becoming ever more widespread and violent, environmental disasters multiply whilst the fish are disappearing from the oceans, and, in combination with protests that are growing ever more violent, there is ever less hope of society and its Left gaining a few more years of peace with its hypocrisy and pacifism. As things descend into chaos, leftists present themselves as skilled strategists by telling people to peacefully vote in (generally rigged) elections for third-place parties...

We can only hope that now the mask is off the illusions of easy solutions will also disappear. There are no more charismatic candidates to delicately conceal the dystopia that we were already living in anyway. The state and society have taken further steps toward totalitarianism shedding their few remaining inhibitions along the way. In such times the only honorable response to the state and its class of rulers can be resistance. Those invested in the existence of the state can plead patience if they want but the *ultima ratio* of princes and peoples is sorting from its long slumber: *popular uprising* is the only solution to today's problems, the only way to end this depraved and crumbling oligarchy.

Meanwhile, with attention switching to the core capitalist states Greece seems to have drifted back to the periphery of interest. For some Leftists, the situation is an embarrassment best not mentioned. By this point few are paying attention to the latest re-run of negotiations, the government's stage managed heroic resistance is just as boring as the next inevitable honest compromise is spineless. Those who do glance at Greece after two years of Syriza see a population demoralized, disorientated and demobilized. The great humanitarians have become the prison guards of Europe while large layers of society get ever poorer. They have done nothing but pave the way for the restoration of the old regime which waits excitedly in the wings.

However, we do not have to look far for a response to this bleak picture. We see it in the honest defiance of the political prisoners, the barricades of Exarcheia, continued resistance to austerity, and the everyday humanity and solidarity which contrasts with the government's hypocrisy. These call us to rethink, regather our strength and continue along the difficult path of struggle that lies ahead. In these difficult times, let's focus on pluralism, respectful disagreements, and positive acts. With that being said let's go on . . .





A TALE OF TWO CITIES

Some useful points from events in Greece and France

In 2016 many of us were impressed by the scenes on the streets of France. Between March and June images of crowds attacking riot police and frequently forcing them to retreat offered encouragement for those looking to create a combative political movement. Last year (*ATR 1*) we were wondering how we in Greece could best respond to new police tactics which were controlling and limiting our demonstrations. Having seen the movement against the *loi travail* in France we can say that it is possible to push back against police encircling tactics and build some offensive spirit and momentum on street demonstrations. While the impact of these events on France is uncertain there are things what we can learn from those months of militant marches that may help us in the situation we face on the Greek streets.

The movement that contested the *loi travail* from its announcement in February to its final confirmation in July was multi-faceted. It involved demonstrations, strikes and blockades, occupations, assemblies and spontaneous marches. Events gradually built over time till what had started out as the usual trade union led half-hearted protest reached a peak in May

and June with large scale industrial action, frequent and widespread clashes with police and constant acts of sabotage or spontaneous attacks. All of this under a constant state of emergency which has been continuously renewed since the Jihadist attacks of November 2015.

These events started simply enough. In February the Socialist government announced a reform of the labour code in favour of businesses. Initially a large number of trade unions opposed the first draft of the measures and the first strikes and demonstrations in March drew hundreds of thousands. A quick redrafting of the law led a number of trade unions to drop out of the movement, satisfied with minor concessions but a number of other unions continued on. The first people to give some combative character and energy to this movement were the high school kids and students. The strike days saw many schools blockaded and the small student demonstrations were lively. Frequently the students picked up bottles and started clashing with the police. Images and videos of the police beating up and abusing the students they captured quickly went around the media and internet. One of the first distinctive moments of the movement came in late March when a day after the police had attacked students on a demonstration a police station in Paris came under attack by another group of demonstrators.

Following another large strike demonstration on 31st March a group of leftist demonstrators headed over to Place de la Republique and set up the first of the *nuît debout* assemblies. Starting off with a film screening and a few people over the next days the assemblies grew into a direct democracy style temporary occupation movement. Quickly daily assemblies were set up which drew hundreds and at times a few thousand people to the square. The assemblies themselves produced little and over time dwindled but earlier on the move to Republique opened up new opportunities as this brought people out between the trade union organised demonstrations. Night time evictions and clashes with the police alternated with spontaneous marches around the city for those not so interested in the assembly discussions. A major benefit of the presence at Republique was that it gave people a point to regather after the end of demonstrations. This way a strike demonstration would be extended with potential for spontaneous marches in the evening.

Over time the large trade union marches featured more and more clashes with the police and attacks on fixed targets. As the marches in Paris always ended in one of the many large open squares these finishing points became fields for prolonged skirmishes. Momentum was building

throughout April with confrontations happening at marches almost every week and other gatherings and spontaneous marches spreading. The largest demonstrations were naturally in Paris but many of the most effective and offensive were in the cities of Nantes, Rennes and Le Havre. At the end of April the calendar presented an opportunity to build the momentum further. A demonstration was planned for Thursday April 28th with May 1st a few days later. There was an expectation that the police would try to clamp down on the increasingly aggressive demonstrations, and indeed they tried. However, they were taken by surprise when the crowds attacked first rather than wait for the inevitable police action. The police responded with a heavy attack on the march that lasted for some hours but despite causing many injuries and using plenty of gas they were unable to break the crowd. When they tried to surround or enter blocs they were met with a barrage of stones, bottles and fireworks. During the demonstrations of late April and early May the police tried to suppress the demonstrations but frequently found themselves being beaten back. The new found confidence and aggressiveness of different groups was shown in the middle of May when as the police held their own protest in Republique to lament the growing violence directed at them a police car was attacked and burnt just a few streets away.

Throughout May and June the police frequently kept to the edges of the large demonstrations as they switched their tactics from trying to confront the militant blocs to trying to contain them to a certain area of the city. The police surrendered the boulevards of the route to the crowd and tried to stay at a distance. By this point the demonstrations were not huge, maybe only around 20,000 in Paris, but the militant blocs of the march, *cortège de tête*, steadily grew to anywhere between 2-5,000. Anyone who wanted to be in the clashes with the police went to the front and joined in as they saw fit. The marches would start off in organised separate blocs but once clashes started the militant sections became very mixed with students, anarchists, individuals and even some trade unionists joining together.

This period of confidence for the people at the demonstrations converged with the most serious industrial unrest. The government had to dip into strategic reserves of fuel when strikes and blockades at refineries started to have an impact on supplies. This was the union's major card but they played it a little too early. The strikes only lasted for a week or so and were ending by the time France began to host the Euro 2016 football tournament in June and July. The high point of the demonstrations came

just after when a national march in Paris saw one of the largest crowds, over 75,000, and large spells of clashes with the police and destruction of targets. In the aftermath the police switched tactics. Unable to control the demonstrations once they got moving they set about repressing the crowds from the beginning. The next planned demonstrations were nearly banned but the unions stepped in to save the government from issuing a ban by allowing the police to take complete control over the area. To get to the start point of a march you now had to pass through at least one police check point where your bags were searched. Plain clothes police patrolled the surrounding streets and many people were arrested or detained before they even got to the demonstration points.

As the demonstrations grew in strength the police increased their arsenal. Large numbers of riot police were deployed and backed up with fences and vans to close off every street leading from demonstration routes. Water cannon, drones and helicopters all came into play and the police made increasing use of 'sting-ball'¹ grenades and plastic bullets with the result that people were seriously injured and lost eyes while at least one person ended up in a coma. Preventative arrests and court orders for people to stay away from demonstrations became common. Gatherings in some areas were banned completely. There was at least one brief skirmish between demonstrators and a military patrol guarding the Invalides area. While the police never officially banned any demonstrations in Paris they set up a full security blanket that made going to demonstrations difficult with the possibility of arrest if you seemed at all suspicious. This complete control approach combined with the final passing of the loi travail effectively ended the movement in July.

Given the way that the movement ended, a formal defeat, it is difficult to say what was gained. No buildings were taken for new centres and squats as they were very difficult to hold. One positive aspect of the movement was that its existence challenged the state of emergency and anti-terror narrative. For a few months the news was dominated by scenes and news of social struggles and conflict with the police rather than reports of the latest anti-terror operation. The dominant slogan "everybody hates the police" was an antidote to the widespread praise of the police and army under the state of emergency. This shift in the atmosphere was quickly wiped out by another jihadist attack in Nice shortly after the passing of the loi travail, since then the state of emergency has been extended twice. With the French state soon to pass to the control of either the fascism of Le Pen, the extreme

neoliberalism of Fillon, or the politer neoliberalism of Macron we will have to wait and see if the force that created itself at the head of the demonstrations against the loi travail will be able to return and develop further in the struggles ahead. A brief return to the streets in full force on September 15th gives some hope that the spirit of the militant blocs will be back again in the future.

For now there are some practical lessons from the movement in France that may be of use elsewhere. We have noted before (*ATR 1*) that one of the challenges currently facing the movement in Greece is the adoption of new tactics by the police. During the last years the Greek police have adopted methods in use in northern Europe and now seek to surround and control demonstrations by creating a wall of riot police and sealing off areas. The events in France this year show that it is possible to confront these tactics and perhaps drive the police back. Ultimately there is a limit to what marches can do and when they feel they are losing control the state can easily ban demonstrations or impose total control. Therefore long term it is better to develop new methods of confrontation beyond planned marches. Examples from France include spontaneous marches, acts of sabotage, blocking roads, metros and rail lines and random attacks on party offices and police stations.

A common feature of recent years in France and Greece is the targeting of methods of control on transport. In France there were several attempts to block means of transport, such as marching on tramlines or into railway and metro stations and sabotage of ticket machines (particularly in Rennes). The campaign for free transport in Athens has been using similar methods with some time with an intensification during the last year. This campaign has seen the involvement of a wide spectrum of groups and tactics. Hit and run actions targeting ticket selling and validation machines have caused the police considerable problems². Free transport briefly came into effect when ticket controllers were temporarily pulled off the job after their names were published online. Since the start of 2017 the installation of new barriers and electronic transport tickets in Athens has continued week by week. However, the authorities are noting with increasing concern that their efforts to introduce the new system are being undermined. The destruction of newly installed machines across the transport network seems to be gathering pace with 42 machines reported destroyed in just 16 days. Since the previous summer 127 machines have been sabotaged. The police are unable to guard the entire transport network. When the authorities moved

police units to guard the metro stations, sabotage of devices on buses increased instead. Ticket barriers have been completely smashed while smaller reading devices on buses are either smashed or removed. While the installation of the new system is being challenged there are questions about the data required to get a new electronic ticket. The Athens transport company wanted people to provide a name, their parent's name, social security number, date of birth, phone number, photo, email and home address just to obtain a ticket. Such a harvesting of data is being questioned even by the mainstream press.

An easy example of how to add to this type of campaign were the gatherings at some metro stations. A public demonstration of a few dozen people blocked the operation of ticket and validation machines for a few hours and gave a chance for people to communicate the goal of free transport directly to passers-by. In both countries campaigns around transport are currently quite important. In Athens it is expected the new electronic barriers will be up and running by spring while in Paris fines have increased and security has been intensified under the cover of counter-terrorism.

A recent positive development in Greece was the organisation and planning shown in the construction and manning of the barricades of Exarcheia on the night of December 6th. Such preparation and actions are vital to increasing the movement's capability to move beyond protest and demonstration. Still, while they will not be decisive, it is important to look for ways to improve the situation at large demonstrations in Greece.

1)Momentum

Momentum is always important. In Greece momentum and energy has largely disappeared from demonstrations. This is understandable. During 2010-12 the major demonstrations had plenty of energy and momentum. Since then we had two years, 2012-14, when this energy and belief was slowly draining away from large crowds and then two years of political confusion under a leftist government. Now, many of the larger demonstrations are demoralised and if they carry the slightest threat they are surrounded and smothered by the police. We can not expect the sudden re-emergence of large aggressive crowds. To get back to the earlier level of energy at demonstrations people will slowly have to build up confidence and abilities again.



In France momentum and confidence were built gradually over the months of the movement. Back in November/December last year demonstrations at the COP 21 were quickly controlled by the police. Before the loi travail movement got underway it was near impossible to believe that within a few months we would have frequent marches with hundreds clashing with the police and many more supporting them. At each stage of the movement people were able to push things a little further and slowly raise the confidence of crowds and the political tension. To begin with it was the students on their own finding bottles to throw. When the police beat them up they gathered the next day and attacked a police station. These scenes brought more people to the demonstrations and encouraged them to take on the police too. With more people coming to the movement new avenues of activity opened up around the spontaneous marches and assemblies. Once people came to expect a march to lead to clashes it was possible to increase the aggressiveness of the crowd until the police were

finding themselves under sustained attack. The police's attempts to crackdown physically at the marches was defeated by this increased aggressiveness of the crowd and soon the police were being seriously challenged, burnt out of their cars, and having to shield themselves behind fences.

Getting to that final point was a slow process of gradually expanding what could be done and what people expected at marches. We need a similar process of rebuilding capabilities and confidence at the large marches in Greece. A move in this direction was the quick attack on the Ianos book store³ at the end of an otherwise demoralised general strike demonstration on December 8th. This action against an exploitative business was carried out in the face of opposition and denunciation by members of the new leftists on the block LAE who would very much like to be the next leaders of the struggle. Starting again from a low point, small acts are needed to regain the initiative.

2)Position

The position of militant blocs in demonstrations has an impact. In Greece the long established tradition is for anarchists to be at the back of a march. In France the situation was the same but a significant change during recent events was that the militant groups took the front of the march. Being at the front gives militant groups a number of key advantages. First, it allows you to set the pace. If leftist or trade union blocs expect trouble at a demonstration they can always speed up and end things quickly. Whoever is at the front sets the pace and tone of the march. Second, it is much easier for the police to surround and isolate groups at the back of a march. In Greece the front blocs of a march frequently disappear when clashes start leaving the fighting groups alone on the street with the police. In the French marches this couldn't happen, the police would have to fight on full streets, which limits their manoeuvrability, as the rear blocs have to stay on the street during clashes if they want to complete their demonstration. Finally, being at the front of the march gives you the advantage of being able to set yourselves up at the end point first. We have all seen in recent years that without a large stationary crowd it is very difficult to do anything but just walk through Syntagma Square at the end of a march, anarchist groups arrive last and find themselves surrounded in a wide open space by a larger crowd of riot police. The French groups arrived in their squares first and so for about an hour or so were able to skirmish with the police while more and

more people were arriving from the rest of the march. Since most of these people quickly passed to the other end of the squares and went away it gave people a chance to slip out of the police cordons before becoming trapped.

If groups in Greece could do the same it would give them a chance to take the initiative away from the trade unions and leftist parties. If militant blocs led the march they would first of all have a long period of time on the street, be able to set up at the destination first, and since many shops and businesses often only put the shutters down when they see the anarchists appear, a longer presence on the streets would automatically increase the disruption caused to the city. Perhaps in Athens this would be difficult to achieve as the strike demonstrations are in reality split into a number of separate marches, any attempt to disrupt the well practised order and routine would likely be resented and contested. In other cities in Greece where the movement has a strong presence and the number of demonstrators is generally smaller it may be easier for groups to take the front of the march. Taking the front of the march can have practical benefits as well as symbolising that we no longer need to follow behind the big battalions of the trade unions and the left as they march to defeat.

3)Material

Beneath all the armour and high-grade defensive equipment the riot police are human and naturally they don't like having a lot of bricks, rocks and bottles thrown at them. A lesson from France is that to drive back encircling riot police units, groups need to keep up a constant barrage of objects. If enough people are throwing enough objects the police will retreat from close contact. In Paris the primary practical materials were bottles (provided by the city's extensive recycling infrastructure), rocks and bricks broken free of the ground by the use of other heavy objects(e.g metal grates around the trees) and fireworks. The advantage of these kinds of materials is that they can be found easily(in Paris at least) and used by anyone. More specialised equipment like molotovs only appeared later and were used to escalate clashes rather than start them. Generally at a march it is better to confront the police with 50 people picking up stones and bottles than with 5 people preparing and throwing molotovs. Few people will take the risk of preparing and bringing molotovs whereas when people see stones at their feet there's a good chance they will join in. These basic objects are more effective as more people can be involved which creates a constant barrage

capable of keeping the police at a distance. Once the fight has started in this way there is an opportunity for people to use different objects to escalate it.

4)Analysis and Ideas

One strength of the movement in France was its ability to analyse events as they were underway. After a march or event basic texts were published with explanations of what happened, what worked and what could be improved. A quick analysis of an event can fix any problems that occurred and helps create a learning process rather than us just repeating the same thing again and again because of a lack of ideas and ways of communicating them. In this direction a useful example appeared online after the night of December 6th, suitably enough it appears to have been written by an international⁴.

5)Who are we?

While not a practical matter it is still interesting to think about who the people on the streets of France were. During the most dramatic of the large marches the whole crowd was often not much above 20,000, of these the proportion that made up the militant groups, *cortège de tête*, increased over time. By May and June this aggressive group at the front of the march was at times as many as 5,000 people all either engaged in or supporting the clashes with the police. This does not mean that 5,000 anarchists suddenly appeared. The group was made up of a whole mixture of people; anarchists, youths and students, young and old, and even some of the trade unionists drawn to the fight. At the same time other anarchists, students and unionists held back and formed the more orderly bulk of the march. There was a remarkable degree of unity in this crowd with little of the arguments and near confrontations between people who wanted different tactics. If you supported the confrontations you went to the front whichever group you belong to, if you didn't you stayed further back. Basically the crowd that created the events in France were not one particular group or section of people but they were the break away elements of all the different groups that wanted to move forward to a confrontation and toward insurrection.

This could be a useful point to consider when thinking of future direction and strategy. We are not one particular section of society, nor representatives of any section. Instead we are a mixture of all the breakaways and runaways of society who want to try and construct a force to challenge the existing order. What drew people to the *cortège de tête* during

those months was not its identity as a single group or organisation but the actions of the people who gathered there. Anarchists may have been some of the early instigators and their actions provided an example but it was when others gathered around them that they started to create something different.

Continuing Events in Paris:

In February weeks of protests, clashes and attacks on police and state targets followed the assault and rape of a young man by police in the Parisian suburb of Aulnay-sous-Bois. Several nights of clashes followed immediately after the report of the incident and spread around the region in the following days. Moving the protests into the city of Paris itself proved difficult but not completely impossible. Any call for a protest against police brutality within Paris proper is met with a complete blockade by the police. Here they have continued the approach they developed last year of surrounding protest areas in a full cordon. This preemptive attempt to stifle protests has not always been completely successful with many people still willing to take on the police and briefly renew the offensive spirit shown last year even when trapped in a police cage. Attempts to continue and spread activities have taken various forms. When protests are blockaded by police smaller groups stage spontaneous marches either after the main gathering or in a different area. One gathering was called for inside the shopping centre of Les Halles, naturally the few hundred people were quickly blockaded but the demonstration at least disrupted one evening's shopping. On the initiative of high school groups several schools in Paris were shut on two separate days in the last week. The students blockaded their schools and marched in the streets and confronted the police (whereas in Greece school movements frequently involve occupation of the school in France blockade and protest are common tactics).



Endnotes

1 grenade de désencerclement- a type of fragmentation grenade which on explosion scatters an area which rubber pellets. At the demonstration of 26th May in Paris a journalist was seriously wounded in the head by the use of a grenade.

2 After a series of attacks on different metro stations the police were forced to station some of the mobile units outside stations, thus tying down one of their main assets. Additionally it is worth keeping in mind that the deterioration of the Greek state's infrastructure is having an impact on the police's capabilities. Recently reports have mentioned problems with out dated communications equipment which enabled a robbery of an industrial site to succeed. The police mobile unit started operations some years ago with 2,000 motorcycles, this figure is now reportedly down to 1,200 of which about half are fully operational.

3 Ianos book store was a fitting target for getting it windows smashed during a strike as previously the owners had called in the riot police to break a strike. <https://athens.indymedia.org/post/1566425/>

4 <https://insurrectionnewsworldwide.com/2016/12/08/dispatches-from-greece-two-the-exarcheia-commune-rises-and-defends-itself-a-review-of-the-battle/>



A SEMI-CONCRETE ORGANIZING PROPOSAL

We so rarely think about utilizing our resources correctly. For instance, many are still stuck in the classic 'national' view of anarchist organizing- this means that in every city, there is supposed to be a 'branch' to which people can join, and the various branches then add up to a national movement, and so on. Those of us from Protestant countries can recognize just how unrelated to contemporary reality this model is.

Why don't we propose a model completely different from this blank abstraction- instead of isolated units joining just anywhere, let's seek places and regions where traditions and opportunities for struggle exist. This necessarily means a finer analysis is called for, instead of just saying everyone is a capitalist or proletarian, and other such superficial sloganeering. Often this kind of strategic thinking has devolved to Marxists, because Anarchists have been so marginal for quite some time. But this more Maoist concept of strategic implantation is truly a valuable one. You can see it at work with the Zapatistas, who initially had their project

informed by this thinking-to find a region with a history of revolt, difficult of access to the state (deep forests or mountains), and to begin sustained political work in such a spot. From the struggles ongoing at the time of their origin, the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, FMLN in El Salvador and Shining Path in Peru, it is clear that this basic strategic thinking influenced their method of operating. It is also at work with the Kurds in Rojava.

Maybe I can be a bit clearer in reference to what I mean, by thinking about some past and contemporary trends. Would it not make the most sense for radical places with traditions of struggle to become a larger center of attention? Often there is an effect of multiplication and a certain critical mass- if we are all groups of five people spread out everywhere, we have a negligible effect. But if many of us get together in a certain neighborhood, city, region or what have you, we multiply our effectiveness. But this is just the basic axiom of concentrating forces in strategic locations. And maybe this thinking is not so necessary for places with long histories of struggle and popular traditions (e.g. the Mediterranean South), but in countries where radicals are a super-minority and the modern Metropolis has fully established itself, it might be worth a serious try. Given the dual options of deepening a radical space or extending influence, with weak movements should be definitely prioritized the former before moving to the latter.

Often these things happen quite randomly- for instance, the Protestants set out to conquer the whole of Christendom, and yet their real successes were only in Northern Europe (where converts from abroad flocked to), and often were maritime cities or isolated and mountainous regions. What if we radicals are not taking over the world tomorrow, and indeed, if in many places we will be perceived as a hated minority by an increasingly totalitarian and decomposing post-modern society? What if we will look less like the inheritors of the Jacobins and Bolsheviks with their world-conquering revolutions, and much more like small rebels on the fringes of larger Empires (the Protestants from the Holy Roman, or the Greeks of the Persian). In this way, I find it worth remarking that Val de Susa today, such a headache for the Italian state, not only had its Resistance in the past, but long before these villages on the fringes of mountains adhered to the semi-Protestant heresy of the Vaudois, just as previously North Italy in general was quite receptive to Cathars and other heretics, and difficult for the Holy Roman Emperors to control. This might attest to a certain difficulty of the terrain itself that lends easily to independent ways of acting. So too, Greece in modern times has always had its *klephts*, and there

is something difficult and fragmented about the mountainous and wild Greek landscape.

The main change would really be, instead of thinking we are going to cut off the head of the beast in one fell swoop, thinking that the detachment of pieces and decline of the modern state, will probably be as partial and prolonged as was its emergence in the centuries of 'Early Modern Europe'. Then the point would be to establish territory and influence for ourselves- and indeed, it would perhaps look something like a 'protracted war', although with serious ethical differences that would necessarily impact the course of such a conflict (for instance what does a protracted war imply, if there is no desire to take over the whole territory of a state, or to make a smaller state? If the goal is not statist control but pluralistic hegemony and influence- if there is not such desire to use murderous violence and to wipe out an enemy conceived as ultimate evil? etc.). The goal would immediately shift from an increasingly unreal universalism and 'mono' desires (which leads to disappointment), to a pluralistic and polymorphic human geography of territories in resistance.

The goal would also have to deal with not re-creating the state and its 'constituent' logic. It would be much closer (as with Agamben's 'destitution') to increasingly denying (obviously in increments) the operation of statist control networks in a certain territory (crucially those of police/justice/surveillance), to rediverting or asserting control over other potentially beneficial flows (flows of transport, money and goods), and creating our own positive circuits (solidarity/green economic cooperatives and products). This method could open up the ways to connect beyond national borders, while remaining locally rooted, thus bypassing the local/global polarity that is a puzzle for much of radical thinking today.

In practical terms, it's always worth thinking about Spain and its revolution. The famous decision the anarchists took in the summer of July 1936 (to defer to reformist politicians, not to assert their preponderant influence in Catalonia) was, in effect, in favor of the unitary national state. The anarchists were supposed to be in favor of destroying it, but in pressures of civil war and revolution, opted to preserve it. But maybe also their thinking, even among the anarchists, was not ready for a type of revolution that would totally destroy the territorial integrity of the state, and necessitate a completely new way of politics, one that thrives on lack of central control-if the colony of Morocco had been freed, but also the Basque and Catalan countries, as well as the small islands? "Spain" at that time

would have been split into the sections in which it was roughly before the celebrated marriage of Ferdinand and Isabella (it would have become, as it was in the Middle Ages, “the Spains”). Yet all this requires is actors willing to abandon the unitary concepts of the state and its territorial integrity, and so to accept political plurality, not controlling all of the territory of the nation-state. The final curtain call for the Leftist Republic was the disastrous 1938 offensive on the Ebro- but if they had conserved their forces in an active guerrilla defense, and made their goal a dismembered or fragmented Spain?

Now the example here is ethnic, so it is not so perfect nor indeed so applicable to West Europe, but the efforts of Kurds in Rojava, proposing a federal association for Syria, show that they have accepted they will never control all of Syria, nor for that matter, all of Turkey or Iraq. But this will put them at a strategic advantage, since all the other groups are determined to expand and control or to keep up the fiction of Syrian or Turkish unified state, whereas Rojava can be content to detach a portion from it. This too is a bit like the situation in Chiapas, even though it is not as immediately dramatic any longer.

I am saying then, what if Anarchy and radical movements in the near-term foreseeable future, at most are only going to influence some portions of territory from modern states? Are we ready for this- and indeed, is our political imagination ready for this down-to-earth objective, instead of the abstract slogan of immediate global revolution, total luxury communism, etc.? If modern revolt will look more like the 'splitting off' federalism of Protestantism, or the Resistance in WW2, than the grand revolutionary pageantry of Paris and St. Petersburg? For instance, if the Greek state breaks down further would older territorial formations begin to assert themselves - the Pelopponesus, an Attic world linked to various islands and Chalkidike, with Crete and Rhodes and larger islands on their own? It is worth thinking about. So too, the regions that make up most modern states are from prior conquests or acquisitions (occasionally denoted by 'natural' things- rivers, mountains, and so forth). They rarely 'naturally' go together in any sort of coherent order. However, it should be noted that one cannot simply parachute in somewhere (however wild or isolated) and expect revolution to arrive- this was the error of Guevara in Bolivia. There also has to be some spiritual adherence of a population to a project of resistance, otherwise no amount of terrain will make up for that primary defect.

This also necessitates a re-thinking of the unitary and “mono” conceptions inherited from the Left. What if we radicals ourselves are not a single coherent entity, but a federated plurality? What if we are not in fact, the poorest of the poor, but generally middle class, and have an ethical view that does not want to control or manage the world of today? If we give up majoritarian visions, and simply want autonomy for our own life? It might mean that the Christian, and basically dualistic imagination of a paradisaical 'City of God' to be implemented on our 'sinful' Earth, would be rejected in favor of many federations of the *polis* freeing themselves on the margin of a gigantic Empire. Would we also not find many different expressions of freedom, not just a flat and universal abstraction?



There might indeed be a sort of silver lining in this toning down of goals. For instance, is one way to avoid “Thermidor” or internal reaction in a revolution simply to have small and manageable goals? Why is it that the Protestants, if they survived a military onslaught (unlike in the Czech lands), never suffered something like the 'capitalist restoration' of 1989? I mean that Catholicism never returned to Holland, Prussia, or Scandinavia-whereas 'capitalism' or Liberalism definitely returned to the USSR, just as the Bourbon monarchy returned to France. Is it maybe that the modern concept of revolution, that involves a minority taking over a state that represents and manages a much larger group, always leads to changing goals or burn-out of that revolutionary minority, then leading to forced internal repression or its own destruction? What if indeed, the secret to avoiding infighting and Thermidor- this unsolved riddle of all the revolutions thus far- would be either to relinquish and disperse power as soon as taken, or indeed, more logically, to never have the idea to take control of the totality of the nation-state in the first place? Is not the clever way to make changes so fundamental that any restoration, even a partial one, will be forced to include them? And is not the new principle of Anarchy going to be to destroy the territorial unity of the state, and will this not be a change no restoration will ever be capable of undoing?

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One inflection point in thinking about social change lies in the English Revolution. There, this Protestant minority made a revolution and took over the state, going so far as the Civil War and to behead the King. But inevitably they had to repress their radical wing of Levellers and Diggers, damaging the common cause, and set up the talented Cromwell as their Protector. So too, when Cromwell died, the entire elaborate revolutionary system completely collapsed, and the Stuart King was welcomed back. Only the misguided policies of this dynasty, and its openly Catholic sympathies and projects, allowed William of Orange to invade the country and be welcomed with open arms. England's revolutionary era was then closed: a moderate and tolerant Protestantism, with a constitutional monarch, became the settled system of governance.

Maybe this revolution, so different from other Protestant experiences, serves to show the problems of a minority trying to impose its ethical views on others through the state, and inevitably foreshadows later developments. There is one difference though, between the later victory of the Protestant cause in 1688, and results of 1789 and 1917. The focus on religion has meant

that even though momentarily defeated, the beliefs are still cherished. The one interesting result might be in France- where the experience of 1789, has never really been forgotten and continues in a folkloric but still real way. Yet the 'political form' for encapsulating this modern spiritual belief has not yet been durably found. That is to say, revolution in its essence cannot really be satisfied with a constitutional monarchy, unlike Protestantism, nor can it really be content with the glaring contradictions of the dictatorship of the proletariat advocated by Marx.

Moreover, if we get rid of the unitary state, this also means we get rid of its unitary means of control-besides forces of repression, the most significant being the currency. The debate nowadays is always around false alternatives- euro or drachma- eu or exit? That is to say it is still the same modern secularized 'mono' viewpoint, of the one magic solution, the one final determining cause, the one true god to worship. Let's start to oppose to the "one" of today, a total plurality. Not euro or drachma, *but the euro, and drachma, and local currencies, barter and gifts, e-currency, expropriation, counterfeit money and other foreign currencies- the chaotic monetary world of a collapsed state.* "Sovereign is he who controls the currency", in my view would be quite an important adage. But if the one currency is consciously destroyed, there is no statist sovereignty, and we go back before the formation of the modern state, where there were many currencies, none of which inspired much faith. If people lose their faith in the one currency then the state will lose its dividend of faith that it currently enjoys- in truth it is just one mafia among others. Then the state loses its levers of compulsion that it currently has – planned inflation that eats away at normal incomes and purchasing power, false economic statistics, and so forth. People lose their faith in money, and business comes once more into disrepute: great! Capitalist behavior, along with the state, is dealt a lingering death blow.

*

Anarchists famously focus both on God and the State. So let's also touch on religion, another practical thing, especially as most refugees nowadays are Muslim. If anarchists don't understand that their victory is about unleashing pluralism, not about imposing one way of life (even if theirs is the most philosophically grounded, being secular), then I don't think we will get very far. We will just seem like leftists with an inferiority complex, wanting to take the power over a whole society, but unable or unwilling to do so. Whereas the really exciting thing would be to have no

desire to take power over an entire society, but to be determined to fragment it, to allow all kinds of liberties to express themselves (even, and it has to be understood, liberties for some things we do not agree with). A portion of the society would side with us, and many portions would side with other political groupings. The task would immediately switch from a revolutionary war to assert control (which always has meant the formation of the Terror and always doomed revolutions) to revolutionary political strategies in a pluralistic (not Manichean) setting: uniting with our friends, keeping many forces neutral, finding allies and dividing our enemies.

In 1917, the Bolshevik religious policy was a continuation of the Jacobin one. The Jacobins banned the Catholic state religion, and gave civil liberty to Protestants and Jews (with these latter reforms still being kept by Bonaparte). So too the Bolsheviks, in their early phase, hit at the Orthodox Church, protected various sectarians and synagogues, and in portions of Russia also tolerated Islam. I believe Anarchy take a cue from this, but also can be a bit different and softer, especially as the situation has changed in our times. The goal is not to wipe out any religion, but to control and neutralize them all, underneath a 'secular' political life. In this sense the enemy is Christianity as previously (since this is still the dominant religion in Western societies), but the goal is to put it in a smaller box (in the European South, it will lose most of its ill-gotten property, its unjust privileges, have to contribute much more financially to the community, etc.), not to wipe it out, which is the task of education, propaganda and a successful society. After all, Europe has become notably less Christian since 1789, but this is far less due to 'Red' persecution than to the gradual course of education and critique in the past two centuries, and also the world being filled with more optimistic thinking about the value of life.

Rojava shows us a good example of pluralistic religious policy, because the political life is officially secular, even though religion is permitted. Moreover, a large campaign of the militias recently was to defend the Yazidis from ISIS. But who are the Yazidis- depending on the scholarship we consult, they seem to be either Gnostic dualists or polytheists. But basically they are not very orthodox Muslims, at any rate, and this is why ISIS was after them. But here is in action a good program of revolution, where religious minorities are protected from persecution.

Another correlate is that if the past era was one of total conflict along the lines of Manichean 'political theology', it now seems that everyone has agreed on the basic questions of statist dogma. This might be because the

only real ethical difference today lies in a completely different stance as regards the state. But this can never take on the universalist, 'mono' virulence of the past, because Anarchy is splitting apart the state, not fighting to control and impose its will on everyone. The only real expressions of politics today are in conflict with the state- but such a politics, restored to its older meanings, inevitably carries with it the idea of a pluralism that is against any sort of unitary vision.

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The way to wipe out the state is to promote pluralistic territorial disintegration into many regions. The way to wipe out the Church is to promote pluralistic disintegration of monotheistic claims, with multiple religions. This would be done out of the belief of the Young Hegelians, that the Church and the State are intertwined. If you knock out the State but leave the Church strong, or vice versa, they will work to resurrect the one the other. Anarchist revolution shares its heritage with all the prior ones, even if it will be something truly new, and indeed, almost unimaginable. This means in a certain sense completing the bourgeois revolution, which in Greece (and in a general way, everywhere) never completely secularized political life, and completing the proletarian one, whose true goal is the destruction of the state. These brought into a higher synthesis is the lofty horizon before us.

*

I suppose in practical terms, there could be proposed to everyone a bit of a thought exercise:

-Is a long-term (10+ years) plan of social resistance in your local Metropolis really practical and effective? If so, in what neighborhoods? Is there any university asylum or no-go area for the police? Is radical life even affordable or possible? How can gentrification be neutralized or minimized- are there economic cooperatives to keep the money flowing in for non-speculative purposes, are luxury cars getting burned, cameras being smashed, squats and struggles being made in the streets? Can you mount a popular social campaign over a long period of time, like "Free Transportation for All" in Athens?

-What regions in any particular state have histories of resistance, separatism, labor struggles, alternative lifestyle communes of the New Left or other past Utopian experiments, ethnic, religious or cultural differences-

and is it worthwhile and possible trying to 'implant' anywhere there? Is anything going on already that could be joined and influenced or reinforced- are there any environmental struggles or potentially problematic infrastructural projects?

-If you do go to a region outside the Metropolis, will you be in a really small village, a larger town, or a provincial capital? How will you keep from being isolated, or swallowed by normality? What positive things will you bring to the local community, or how in general will you fit in? Would the local community support squatting? And if not, will you buy or rent separate houses, or live all together? Will you establish a cooperative, or a political/autonomous space, and if so, how will it relate to the local community?

-What are the economic sectors of a particular state, and how do they relate to these regions where you live or might live- do they exploit some place as an agricultural hinterland, or for tourism, or landfills; is it completely underdeveloped, or is it rather quite developed? Is an area urban or rural, suburban or wilderness- and what is its role in larger economic flows? Could any product, idea or service be easily introduced, or conversely, current ones neutralized, captured or reconverted, that would give you a solid economic base?

This is not a comprehensive list, just some basic starting suggestions, since everything will have to be tailored to local conditions. But if individuals, affinity groups, and even organized or informal federations, start to think more broadly and systematically along these lines, I am confident they will see its worth and potential for organizing efforts at collective resistance given the darker and darker times we are entering.

ANTI-CAPITALIST TACTICAL SPECTRUM

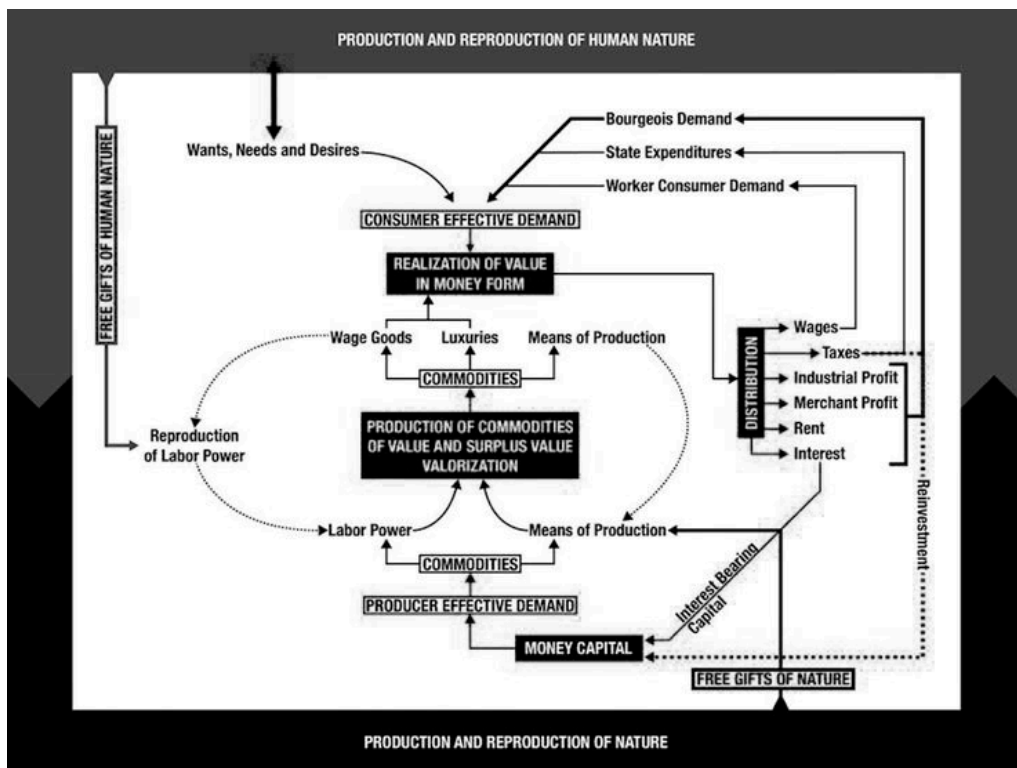
What constitutes effective anti-capitalist struggle? While this essay does not pretend to offer a definitive answer to this question, nor advocate a supposedly “correct” vision of how to proceed, it does offer a provocation. Essentially, this essay engages in a thought experiment that posits the following: The only truly effective tactical orientation must be one that is consciously focused on the systemic imperative of capital accumulation, seeking to purposely disrupt the various circuits of capital through direct engagement while simultaneously seeking to erode profitability and growth through strategic withdrawal.

By concentrating squarely on the domain of capital, I am advocating for looking at the targets and goals of direct actions through a very particular “window.” The term “window” is meant to evoke the notion of a conceptual bracketing of real-world phenomena into manageable parts for the purposes of analysis. Any particular window provides a unique perspective onto the totality, and each perspective reveals its own level of truth. However, there is an implicit processes of holding constant whatever may be revealed by looking through a different window. Therefore, no one window can provide total truth, and we will always have to strive toward a synthesis of many different perspectives.

The perspective adopted here obviously privileges the sphere of capital, what one might refer to as the systemic sphere, exhibiting that the need for ongoing capital accumulation and expansion is integral to the system. It does not deny that the political state is another aspect of the totality, and one that interacts in countless ways with the sphere of capital. There is, in fact, a necessary codependence between them, and one within which we cannot help but to exist and with which we cannot help but to contend. However, it ultimately recognizes the power of commodity imposition through the capital-labor social relation as fundamental, and one in which the current state is in no position to overturn.

The term circuits, of course, refers to Marx’s own formulation, most commonly represented as: $M-C(MP+LP)...P...C'-M'$ where M represents money used as capital; C refers to the commodities bought for the purposes of production, i.e. means of production (MP) and labor power (LP); P refers to the production process itself; C' signifies the new commodity that

emerges from the process of production that has now been imbued with surplus value; and M' represents the realization of profit through the sale of the newly produced commodity.



We all know of course that value and surplus value are produced in many ways outside of traditional factory production, so often P does not result in something that emerges off of an assembly line. It can perhaps be someone answering a telephone in a call center, or someone delivering a package. Nonetheless, what this formula properly displays is that there is a necessary sequence of events that must occur in order for capital accumulation to successfully take place, and thus for the entire system to function properly. Also, most importantly for our purposes, it displays that there are many moments within and throughout this process that are susceptible to disruption.

Thus, this essay posits that if the potential barriers throughout the circuits of capital are the source of its weakness, then anti-capitalist strategy should involve a purposeful attempt to exploit these weaknesses in order to

bring about systemic change, regardless of what may be happening in the political sphere. I suggest that we should conceptualize a spectrum of tactics that aim to actually challenge capital directly while also realistically working toward constructing non-capitalist forms of daily life (which is a challenge to capital in itself), rather than focusing on agents of the state. We can stake out two extremes of this tactical spectrum as they would exist in their purest forms, disregarding any complications that might arise in their pursuit.

At one end of the spectrum we have tactics that we could label as Passive/Creative. The goal here would be to focus our efforts toward the creation of spaces of relative autonomy from capitalist markets and logic. This represents an attempt to extricate ourselves from the systemic imperatives of accumulation and expansion through the construction of non-capitalist circuits of production, distribution, exchange, consumption, and waste. It encompasses actual living conditions rather than moments of conflict. It is not only a different conceptualization of everyday life, but is also attempting to actualize the theory of a post-capitalist world. Thus, tactics at this end of the spectrum encompass attempts to produce and reproduce daily existence based on collectively-determined metrics of need satisfaction rather than capitalist notions of value.

For example, one of the primary goals and achievements of primitive accumulation was to divorce human beings from direct access to the means of subsistence. While it may not sound sexy or exciting, one of the key elements of effective anti-capitalist struggle and the creation of post-capitalist autonomy must be regaining direct control of the production of sustenance, as the concept of self-sustainability is diametrically opposed to constant capitalist expansion. However, there are in fact already existing examples of passive tactics here in Exarcheia such as ADYE (the self-organized medical center), Parko Navarino, Skoros, the time bank, not to mention the various squats dedicated to housing refugees. All of these examples are providing necessities outside of the logic of capitalist expansion.

The power of passive tactics is that they remain within the rule of law while not participating in the market and enriching the capitalist. They are not necessarily noticeable or newsworthy, but are rather a surreptitious way of eroding profitability. At the other end of the spectrum we have tactics that we could label as Assertive/Destructive. In contrast to Passive/Creative, these tactics have nothing to do with directly sustaining and reproducing daily life. Assertive/Destructive tactics seek to engage in purposeful acts of

subversion that form blockages and disrupt the continuity of flow within and between the circuits of capital. Assertive tactics aim to purposely invoke the crisis tendencies inherent in capitalist accumulation. Any given target would be susceptible in its own unique fashion.

Ultimately, the execution of assertive tactics can only exist in specific moments, and will almost certainly cross the line into illegality, thus knowingly inviting state repression. Questions practitioners might ask are: How can we purposely affect the ability of money capital to purchase the forces of production in the first place? How can we inhibit the ability of extraction of raw materials or their transport to spaces of production? How can we prevent successful production from actually taken place? How can we prevent the finished commodities from making it to the market successfully?

The two most obvious assertive tactics, perhaps, would be attacking the various forms of technology used throughout the accumulation process and the blocking of supply routes. Thus, tactics would include the sabotage of technologies and processes of extraction, production, purchasing, trading, transportation of raw materials and finished commodities, etc. Additionally, finance capital permeates every circuit to varying degrees and is perhaps most unique to current times give the increased financialization of accumulation. In addition to cyber attacks, properly organized mass defaults could be most destabilizing.

At this point a significant distinction must be made clear between the above suggestion to directly attack capital on one hand, and, on the other, that of attacking agents of the state. Assertive tactics are only directly attacking capital if they are sabotaging the circuits, increasing turnover time, affecting profitability or commodification of daily life, etc. Otherwise, they are purely political and do not directly affect the capitalist social relation. A purely political approach is focused on aspects of the capitalist state, which acts as a buffer between the juridically free individual and the capitalist owners of the means of production, representing and perpetuating class interests as a barrier to effective control of means of production.

This is not to dismiss such actions as meaningless. Far from it! For example, the actions that regularly take place in Exarcheia against agents of the state are incredibly important in carving out and maintaining a space of relative autonomy as well as raising revolutionary consciousness. They may not be directly affecting the capitalist social relation in the way set out above, but they provide the space within which to carry out creative tactics

and plan destructive ones. However, I constructed a framework at the beginning of this essay that I am trying to stick to. I am looking through a particular window that gives me a particular vantage point that is not a view of the totality. Thus, to reiterate, I am not suggesting that the tactics put forward here as specifically anti-capitalist are the only important ones, only that they require a strategically targeted conceptualization and execution.

Nonetheless, these two tactical extremes are clearly problematic. The sort of pure island of self-sustainable autonomy completely divorced from market mechanisms cannot possibly exist in the real world as of yet, just as, practically speaking, many forms of large-scale direct sabotage would simply invite immediate state repression. Thus it is true that, in the first instance, we are still bound to the capitalist law of value in many of our interactions, just as in the first instance we are still bound to existing laws which can be enforced rather capriciously.

However, the first instance will not be the last, and social formations are fluid and amenable to change. The need to contend with capitalist notions of value on the world stage should not preclude more localized attempts toward post-capitalist autonomy through the creation of alternative autopoietic circuits, just as the ubiquity of capitalist social relations should not foreclose careful thought about the most effective ways to circumvent the state and disrupt capital directly. The two tactical extremes are not contradictory, but rather complementary. Both are necessary in order to advance a post-capitalist trajectory. We must execute a dialectically oriented strategy that simultaneously constructs while it also dismantles.

Thus, when looking through this particular window, the question we ask becomes: How can we build an organized and united movement (or movement of movements) that can encompass collective efforts toward non-capitalist production and reproduction based on principles of mutual aid and cooperation while also simultaneously engaging in active class struggle that sabotages the circuits of capital accumulation? Coming up with concrete and viable answers to this question is the first step. The next step is to look through a different window to reveal the complications.



THE PARLIAMENTARY DEAD END

What can the Syriza disaster tell us about modern politics in general? Quite a lot, I think.

To refine my focus to a single thought: it demonstrates something quite surprising that we should be coming to take for granted – that the most destructive thing that can happen to a radical leftist political party is that they win.

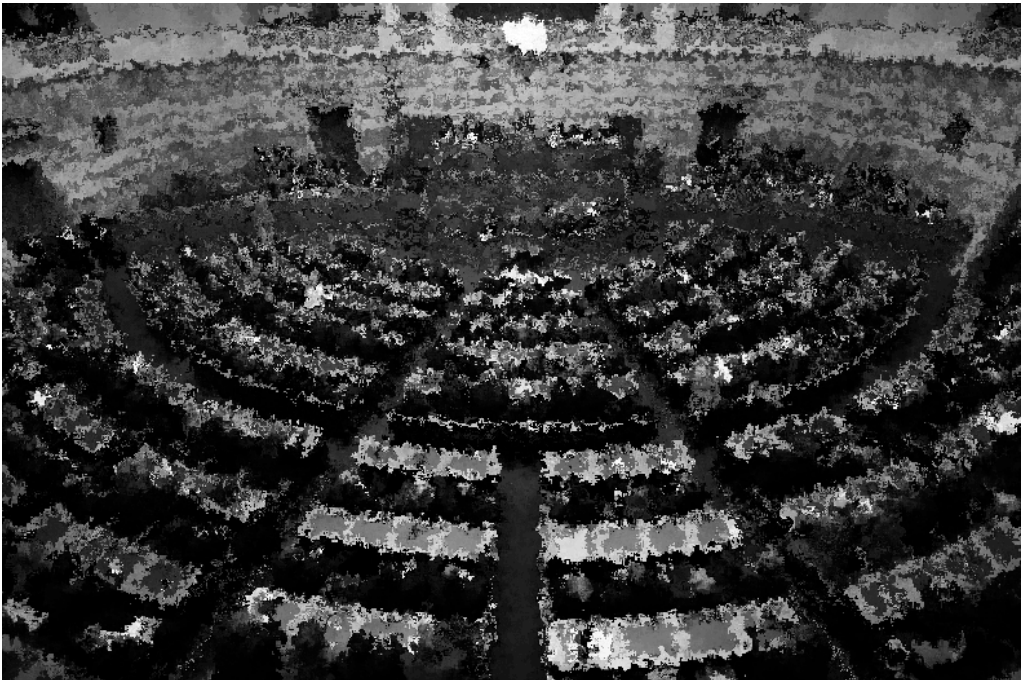
In other words, radical parliamentary approaches do best when they are in opposition, because only here can they pursue a consistent political strategy – one of voicing broadly laudable criticisms of the prevailing situation, whilst also lacking the power to be expected to do anything about it. As soon as they get into government, however, the abject hollowness of their agenda is laid bare for all to see. Suddenly all the radical rhetoric that was used to scoop up votes – the talk of ‘challenging the establishment’, or of ‘putting the people in power’ – begins to look quite out of place, precisely because it is revealed as having come from a party that, by the very fact it has assumed a position of such abject authority, obviously did not believe in its own words in the first place.

To be authentically radical – to be serious about decentralizing political power in any way – can only mean challenging the assumption that one individual or group should be granted the power to rule over the rest of society. But this is the very assumption that any engagement in parliamentary politics presupposes, meaning that it is taken for granted by anyone who lends their support to a political party. This is why the moment that a radical leftist party gets into power is also the moment that their strategy is revealed as being totally inconsistent with their stated aims – be it of enacting socialism, or, in general, of bringing the general public any closer to real political involvement.

How revealing it is that leftists further north than Greece have already abandoned their appraisal (or, really, any mention whatsoever) of Syriza, as if to pretend that such an unparalleled victory for their cause had never even happened. Instead, the excitement for Syriza, now swept casually under the carpet, is swapped for a renewed enthusiasm for parties like Podemos – an option that, by contrast, ultimately failed at the ballot. Here the winners are cast off for the losers, precisely because the deceptive consistency of their pointless agenda is dependent on the very fact that it does not come to fruition.

With the impotency of Syriza becoming overwhelmingly clear, we can only hope that the anarchist movement in Greece – previously deprived of so much of its revolutionary zeal by the political confusion of a leftist government – can begin to regenerate its strength. As it turns out, there are few things that will depoliticize people quicker, and cast doubt on their collective agency more damningly, than the parliamentary success of those who pose as our friends. No less, and with just a little forethought, perhaps our comrades abroad can learn from this unambiguous debacle, and save time by abandoning in advance the political professionals who pretend to be on the side of the people whilst simultaneously campaigning for the right to rule them.

Let's do everyone a favour by confronting these facts head on.
The times are far too urgent to vote!





AN ANARCHIST AFFECTION FOR DEMOCRACY

“I’ve recently returned from the Kurdish Autonomous Region in Northern Syria, known as Rojava, where I had the opportunity to observe a unique form of democracy implemented by a revolutionary libertarian social movement. [...] These innovations seem like good first steps towards turning democracy from a worthless antiquity into a workable principle within anarchist theory.”

Paul Z. Simons,
'Rojava: Democracy and Commune'

The status of democracy within the anarchist movement seems to be a pretty hot topic at the moment. In the previous issue of *The Anarcho Tourist Review*, one author wrote that “if anarchism is to become more of a force in the world, it would mean rejecting the current democratic values”. The anarchist movement, they argue, suffers from an overabundance of democracy, and we would thereby do well to accept the implicitly elitist nature of our ideas. Moreover, and in Greece as much as elsewhere, many

anarchists argue that the concept of democracy has been irredeemably corrupted by modern politics, or even that anarchy and democracy were always incompatible. On the contrary, my aim here is to establish the importance of a commitment to democracy for the wider anarchist movement. The concepts of anarchy and democracy ultimately sit very well together – so well, I argue, that jettisoning the democratic commitment risks seriously undermining the potency of the anarchist agenda.

[I]

First things first, this section is used to argue that anarchism and (certain forms of) democracy are fully compatible. My approach here rests, no surprise, on the important distinction between direct and indirect democracy. Modern politics is dominated by the form of indirect democracy, in which politicians are elected to government, whilst direct democracy involves ordinary people engaging in political decision-making for themselves. For one, so many anarchist critiques of democracy are implicitly leveled against its indirect form – the one that dominates popular consciousness. And it is, of course, quite clear that any system in which a tiny group of political professionals makes the decisions for literally millions of others needs to be ardently rejected by anarchists. However, time is also wasted on talking about indirect democracy as if it were even open for consideration, because, as a political system that obviously presupposes the need for the state, it goes without saying that it is something that no committed anarchist would touch.

In fact, we should seriously be asking whether indirect forms of political participation even deserve to be called democratic in the first place (Chomsky, for example, is amongst the at least vaguely anarchist thinkers making this point). The core concept of democracy, as arising from its etymology, is *rule by the people*. And it is hard to see how, in a system in which a government is elected for the explicit purpose of administering a nation state, it is the people who are doing the ruling. No doubt, electoral systems allow ordinary people to have something of a say in deciding who will rule them, and maybe that counts for something. However, insofar as a minority group is vested with the explicit task of ruling over the rest of society, it is quite obvious that the general public will not be the ones in charge. As such, it seems that, just as most anarchists are ready to say that Somalia is not really in a state of anarchy, and also that the Soviet Union offered neither communism nor socialism in a strict sense, we should also

forget about calling the current system democratic. In a roundabout sense, therefore, we should reject (the mainstream conception of) democracy on the basis that it is undemocratic. The present discussion thereby shifts to the more interesting question regarding the relationship between anarchism and *direct* democracy.

There is no reason to think that anarchism is incompatible with this purer, more direct approach to democracy – the one that is genuinely committed to bringing about rule by the people. After all, if anarchists are not attempting to put the people in power, then what is it that we are even trying to do? Indeed, it is often overlooked that the core concepts of anarchy and democracy are actually very similar. Etymologically speaking, anarchy means *no rulers*, and it is hard to see how a situation in which there are no rulers would be significantly different to one in which the people simply rule themselves. If the general public is the highest political authority there is, and *everyone* thereby takes part in ruling the political community, then this is really no different to saying that there are no rulers altogether. To establish true democracy thus can only mean to level the distinction between those who rule, and those who are ruled. And this is also to say that, irrespective of whether or not people are happy to call it anarchy, a thoroughgoing commitment to democracy can only mean a rejection of the state, capitalism, and social hierarchy in general. My belief is thus that the term democracy should be reclaimed as a fighting word rather than quarantined. Instead of ceding this revolutionary tool to the establishment, we should be thinking about how to turn democracy against them – about how to deprive the state of this dubious linchpin of its legitimacy.

This approach runs contrary, for example, to one forwarded in a recent article released by Crimethinc. (*From Democracy to Freedom*). Here democracy is defined – along with aristocracy, autocracy, bureaucracy, and technocracy – as just another form of government, another attempt by one subset of society to rule over the rest. Moreover, the characterization of democracy as an inherently statist ideology is hardly an anomaly, and is actually pretty popular amongst anarchists nowadays (The Coordination of Anarchist Group's *Against Democracy* is another key example). However, it nonetheless stands (as was previously mentioned) that this kind of anarchist critique is really only relevant to indirect, rather than direct, forms of democracy. Insofar as direct democracy is genuinely realized, which is to say that all members of the political community play a role in its administration, then the existence of a government is hardly implied. To say that everyone

takes part equally in governing surely entails that the government, understood as a body distinct from those being governed, is thereby effectively dissolved. Here it would not be a matter of one subset of society ruling over another, but instead of ordinary people doing away with mediated political power altogether and simply ruling themselves. Unless we want a world with no rules *whatsoever*, there is no reason for anarchists to have a problem with rule by the people.

Having said that, however, it should be noted that not all forms of direct democracy deflect the worry of reproducing governmental structures. Particularly outside of more radical circles, direct democracy is normally realized in the form of majoritarian decision-making. Here the majority gets their way, and those in the minority simply have to put up with what is decided. Now, it is true that majoritarian systems reproduce, albeit in a much more fluid sense, an order in which one subset of society rules over the rest. However, this would be a silly reason to do away with talk of democracy altogether. All it suggests is that we should prioritize systems based around achieving consensus. Insofar as everyone consents to the decisions they are subject to, there is no hierarchy of one section of society over another. Moreover, and not by coincidence either, consensus decision-making is also the option that remains truest to the democratic ideal, because majoritarian approaches really only offer rule by *most of* the people, and not by the people in general.

Bringing this discussion of the compatibility between anarchy and democracy to a close, it is worth taking a quick look at the example offered by the Occupy movement. Something striking here is that the typical Occupy camp was, quite arguably, a genuine microcosm of an anarchist society. They were political communities that were organized horizontally, without leaders, and on the basis of consensus, all of which was combined with a hostility towards the state, capitalism, and oppressive social structures more generally. And yet, the movement was not rooted in anarchist ideas, but instead in a fuzzier commitment to 'real democracy'. This overall point surely confirms how close, both in theory and in practice, anarchy and democracy really are to one another (something that advocates of both ideals frequently overlook). All that needs to be done is to interpret the concept of democracy in a more thoroughgoing way, one that refuses to presuppose that the current global order is in fact democratic. Nonetheless, however, the Occupy movement has since melted away, or worse been siphoned off into reheating an incoherent enthusiasm for parliamentary

politics. But perhaps the real problem here lay not with the convictions of those involved, but instead with our own failure, as anarchists, to nourish those convictions with the radical depth they deserved. Henceforth we must make it clear: anyone serious about getting to the bottom of the democratic ideal can only unearth the fountainhead of anarchy.

[II]

This section is used offer an argument for the usefulness of the principle of democracy for anarchist organizing. In making this case, it is worth noting, for one, that the principle of anarchy – the commitment to bringing about a world without rulers – really only entails a purely *negative* political outlook. This is because the fact of abolishing mastery is only necessarily connected to the destruction of the current order, and thereby fails to imply what kinds of social structures (if any) should be constructed as replacements for the currently dominant ones. In other words, whilst worrying *only* about anarchy explains what we disagree with, it fails to set out the alternative we are supposed to be proposing. In this sense, an exclusive commitment to the principle of anarchy is consistent with an outcome that most would find patently unacceptable – perhaps a world in which there are, strictly speaking, no rulers, but that is nonetheless just as atomized, dysfunctional, and individualistic as the decomposed pseudo-society we see today. This confirms the need to be on the lookout for additional political principles – ones that are more *positive* in nature – in order to facilitate the generation of a more comprehensive anarchist political programme.

Here is where the principle of democracy, insofar as it is considered on an anti-statist basis, becomes somewhat indispensable (at least for more prosocial approaches to anarchist organizing). The relevant theme here is the attainment of autonomy (and, when it comes down to it, this goal is possibly the most viable candidate for the highest good of the anarchist movement). On the one hand, autonomy is often thought about as an individualistic endeavour – as the process by which someone comes to behave in a way that is consistent with their authentic beliefs or desires, and is thereby established, as Kant would have said, as *the giver of their own law*. On the other hand, however, it is no less important to recognize the undeniably collective dimension to the attainment of autonomy. Even Stirner, for example – as hardened an anarchist individualist as you could find – argued that some kind of 'union of egoists' was necessary for



promoting individual flourishing. This brings to mind a more collectivistic (and also distinctly more Spinozan) approach to understanding autonomy – one in which a number of individuals come together to form a single body, decide what form the self-organization of the community will take, and thereby realize their autonomy *in common* with one another.

This concept of collective rulership – one that could be applied to offer a positive characterization of our proposed social structures – is precisely the one offered by the more thoroughgoing interpretation of democracy outlined in the previous section. And whilst some anarchists would perhaps prefer not to use the term democracy to refer to this concept, doing so would only require coming up with an entirely new term that was nonetheless etymologically identical to the one we already have. In sum, therefore, anarchist democracy (really its only kind) can be thought about simply as autonomy collectivised – as the attempt not merely to balance the interests of the individual with those of the collective, but to strengthen both in virtue of their union. In this sense, one might say that the principles of anarchy and democracy are fundamentally symbiotic: anarchy gives rule by the people the necessary radical depth, whilst democracy provides our anti-statism with a blueprint for planning how the future will be organized.

To make this discussion a little less abstract, I conclude here by positing (as was previously implied) that this concept of collective rulership can only be practically manifested in the form of consensus decision-making. Because really this is the only way of maintaining a robustly horizontal organizational structure – one in which the opinions of *all* individual members are supported by the decisions reached by the

collective. As such, consensus decision-making is the only model that is capable of combining both the individualistic *and* the collectivistic forms of autonomy, the outcome of which is a synthesis in which the individual is incorporated into a larger communal body without sacrificing their personal dispositions. Moreover, this model is already well versed in many radical circles – from animal rights and environmentalist campaigns, through more mainstream movements such as Occupy and Nuit debout, right down to most of the squats here in Athens. Of course, I do not deny that there can be issues with consensus, but I would nonetheless maintain that these are not unavoidable problems as much as they are simply of consensus done badly. At the very least, it seems clear that consensus should be sought as a first port of call, and that it can only legitimately be abandoned – if at all – insofar as collective functionality will otherwise be significantly compromised (maybe this would be something to think about if anarchist communes were to begin federating with one another in the future).

[III]

Moving on, this section is used to strengthen the plausability of the anarchist commitment to democracy by clarifying the limits of democratic processes (and, in doing so, to alleviate the fear that the revolution will just be a big, long meeting...). My basic view here is that, in those cases where formal political association is needed, we should be ordering such interactions democratically. Importantly, however, this is not to say that *all* aspects of political life require formal association. In fact, it seems clear that the vast majority of them do not, and here democracy is irrelevant simply because no form of rule whatsoever is applicable. If people are behaving in ways that have no significant bearing on the interests of others, then there is no need to consult a collective decision-making body regarding the relevant issues in the first place. Because a commitment to democracy is not some panacea that will remedy all the shortcomings of the anarchist movement, it is merely a useful way of thinking about how to unite a diverse range of individuals into a single body (and only when doing so is necessary). The door nonetheless remains open to the great many instances of human life that ultimately have no bearing on the need for formal association.

This point can be developed in the form of a criticism of how an enthusiasm for the applicability of democracy, whilst essential for movements such as Occupy and Nuit debout to maintain, was also sometimes taken a bit too far. On the one hand, it was stunning to see how

they demonstrated the redundancy of centralized institutions when organizing around issues that significantly effected the interests of all participants – perhaps where and when to set up a protest camp, or what rules those within it would be subject to. On the other hand, however, it was a big problem for some of the more docile participants in the movement to attempt to disown more militant actions – such as confrontations with the police, or attacks on the flows of capital – by claiming that they lacked the support of the general assembly (that not everyone showed up to anyway!).

The problem here is that a phony commitment to democracy was used to tell other members of the political community what to do. And I say that this commitment was phony because the very point of democracy is surely to promote autonomy, whilst applying collective decision-making processes to irrelevant aspects of the struggle ultimately does the exact opposite. Respecting autonomy often means knowing when it is time to agree to disagree, and this requires encouraging, or at least being willing to tolerate, a diversity of tactics. Otherwise, in refusing to allow others to act in ways that seem disagreeable, such movements began to look a little like the monolithic, totalizing force that dominates global politics today – precisely what they were supposed to be challenging. At the end of day, just as those who were more militant were not forcing others to take part in their actions, those who did not want to take part also had no right to try to stop them. And, whilst it is true that militancy often invites state repression, it is no less true that boredom and passivity are always going to be at least as big a threat to any vibrant social movement.

Finally, in terms of offering a final refinement to my overall view, it is important to explain something that has so far only been hinted at. Whilst I think a commitment to democracy is integral for the construction of a cohesive political community, it is undeniable that many anarchists ultimately have no interest in being part of a united body at all. This disposition is favoured by plenty of the anarchists in Exarcheia, and also elsewhere (particularly by those of a more nihilist flavour). Rather than wanting to restructure politics in an authentically nonhierarchical way, these anarchists are seemingly more committed to smashing politics altogether. If they believed there were cases in which formal political association was useful, perhaps they would accept some kind of commitment to democracy, but their basic claim is probably that there are *no* cases in which such relations are worthwhile. Now, this is not the place to wade into the already long simmering debate between nihilist and social

anarchism (something that is becoming increasingly tense in Athens nowadays). Nor do I want to discredit those anarchists who have much more time for burning, and none at all for meetings, because this attitude is surely an important part of any effective mosaic of resistance. All I will say here is that my case for the importance of democracy is based on the presumption that we *should* be aiming to build a cohesive political community, whilst those anarchists who have no interest in working together in the first place ultimately escape my conclusion.

[IV]

I turn now to responding to the democratic scepticism that arises from the article quoted in my introductory paragraph (*Fragments for the New Politics*). Here the author argues that it is not merely statist who tell the rest of society what to do, because we do it all the time as well. Given the fact that anarchism is currently somewhat unpopular, it follows that every assertion of our beliefs is based on the assumption that the vast majority of people are wrong, and that we are the ones who know what is best for them. Now this hardly sounds very democratic... On the contrary, it sides much more with Emma Goldman's ominous claim that "all true anarchists were aristocrats". As such, the author argues that, rather than going as far as totally abandoning a commitment to democracy, we should be mixing it with an openness to more centralized political forms such as aristocracy. This was allegedly the model seen in Ancient Athenian democracy, in which popular participation was balanced with the guidance of aristocrats such as Pericles. And this approach is supposedly also quite sensible, because ordinary people clearly make bad decisions all the time.

My response is that, whilst anarchism can be called aristocratic in a rhetorical sense, our obvious pretensions to being a righteous minority do not actually override a commitment to democracy. Yes, we tell people what we think is best, but, unlike with the aristocracy, the safeguarding of autonomy constrains the words of anarchists not to exceed the force of mere recommendation. Anarchism is not about taking control of the state in order to attempt to liberate the people, it is about convincing the masses to knowingly take the steps necessary to liberate themselves – this much is clear. In fact, an outright hostility to such aristocratic attitudes is surely presupposed by the important recognition amongst anarchists that parliamentary approaches to politics are nowadays completely outdated. The key point here is that, beyond their undone top-buttons and hollow

affirmations of people power, statists like Syriza are no less committed than the right-wing to supporting a system in which a cadre of political professionals get to tell the rest of society what to do. For an anarchist to make such arguments, whilst also supporting an openness to aristocracy, would succumb to a weird kind of crypto-Marxism – a political concoction made all the more dangerous by the fact that it is disguised as a strategy for abolishing mastery.

Relatedly, there is good reason to believe that the idea of mixing democracy with aristocracy is also somewhat incoherent. The existence of a democracy means, in essence, that the general public are the supreme authority within a political community, whilst the existence of an aristocracy means that supreme authority is held instead by the upper class. However, it is impossible to imagine a political community with more than one supreme authority, precisely because the supremacy of an authority entails that it is *the highest* within that community. Even if, for example, aristocrats like Pericles listen carefully to the concerns of the people, the community will, insofar as the final say goes to the upper class, nonetheless be an aristocracy. Just as well, even if members of a democracy follow the proposals of certain people more than those of others, the political community will – insofar as such recommendations are followed in a genuinely voluntary way – nonetheless remain a democracy. As such, there is no way we can have aristocracy *and* democracy – either we want the people to be at the top (and that means the very top!) or we do not. In fact, it was surely the failure to recognize the contradiction inherent in this two-faced kind of strategy – other versions of which have been democratic centralism, state socialism more generally, and even Bakunin's proposal for secret societies to control popular uprisings – that led to the implosion of the majority of leftist revolutions that defined (and doomed) the last century of human history.

What it ultimately comes down to is the question of whether or not we are willing to put our trust in the capabilities of the masses. However, I think it is clear what, as anarchists, our answer needs to be. For one, whilst it is true that people often make bad decisions, this point is not relevant to democracy as much as it is to human psychology in general. Humans can be pretty stupid, and there is no political system that escapes this basic fact. As such, whilst democracies can indeed produce reprehensible outcomes (perhaps the execution of Socrates is an example), there is also no guarantee that aristocracies will behave any better. If anything, democracy is surely the least imperfect remedy to our all too human shortcomings. My assumption

here is that political communities will tend to reach the best outcomes if they act in accordance with the views of all members, rather than only those of a privileged elite. And, whilst this assumption may be controversial for some, it should be a given for all serious anarchists. Because if we are unwilling to encourage people to organize themselves, and insist instead on introducing some kind of coercive vanguard, then we must surely give up on the idea of anarchy altogether. Anarchy was never merely about challenging the state, it was about challenging political mastery in all of its forms – even if the masters are waving red and black flags! If the heroic days of the proletariat, or *le peuple*, (or whoever!) really are over, then the heroic days of anarchism, too, have ended before they could even begin.

[V]

To give a brief summary of what has already been said: I began by making my case for the friendliness between anarchy and democracy, and then set out the role that democracy could be playing in the anarchist movement – something that culminated in an appraisal for consensus decision-making. This discussion was then tempered with a few points regarding the limited applicability of formal political association in general, after which I responded to the democratic scepticism seen in *Fragments for the New Politics* by arguing that anarchism is dependent on an undilutable commitment to democracy. Finally, I turn now to offering my last (and surely key) reason for thinking that aligning ourselves with anti-statist democracy can greatly increase the potency of the anarchist agenda.

One thing we rarely think about seriously enough is how best to make our movement mainstream – how to enable anarchism to overflow from the squats, and the dustier corners of libraries, and into the forefront of collective consciousness. Relatedly, it can be easy to forget, having spent too much time within activist milieus, just how radical our political programme really is. Even in its most minimal sense, anarchism amounts to a rejection of the state, capitalism, nations, borders, banks, prisons, and the police, and it is thereby unavoidable for most people who are new to our ideas to be met with a certain degree of inaccessibility. To be clear, I am not saying that we should be watering down our message at all, because it is our unapologetic distinctiveness from the outdated rituals of modern society that grants anarchism its profound relevance. All I am suggesting is that there is a need to be on the lookout for methods of making our alternative seem a little less scary.

Accordingly, I wonder if a rejection of democracy – amongst the most highly regarded of all political ideals, something almost everyone takes for granted – would not ultimately cement our lingering irrelevance even more. For many, claiming that anarchism is against rule by the people might be just a bit too much to take. If, on the other hand, it was proven that a thoroughgoing commitment to democracy actually entails an unequivocal rejection of statist politics, one could hardly overestimate the gains. I think some of the remarks made in the first section, namely those claiming that anarchy and democracy are actually conceptually very close, suggest that such an approach is waiting to be experimented with. Instead of rejecting democracy, why not use it as a foothold in collective consciousness, a kind of handrail capable of guiding people, just a little more gently, to the radicalism of our agenda? Speaking anecdotally, I realize, for one, that this was exactly my own passage to anarchism: having internalized from birth the reactionary dispositions of our culture, it was only upon recognizing that we actually *do not* live in a democracy, whilst nonetheless remaining firm on my belief in the democratic ideal, that I first found myself critiquing the legitimacy of the state. Rule by the people means the abolition of social hierarchy, and the time has come to emphasize this neglected truism.

Really our only obstacle is the fact that the establishment has already succeeded in debasing the common understanding of democracy. It is undeniable that this mechanism is nowadays the Trojan Horse of modern politics – an ancient ideal so deviously hollowed out that it has gone as far as granting secular authoritarianism an air of legitimacy. However, the democratic ideal, as universally assumed as it is underestimated, can still be turned against the powers that be. If anything, the fact that it has been so deeply internalized by mainstream culture offers us, in combination with its anarchist implications, a serious advantage. Democracy is sitting in the stomach of the state, and it is ready to be converted into a virus. Many people are already beginning to ask how democratic the current situation really is, and all we need to do is fill these doubts with a degree of political maturity. Granted a fair amount of fine polishing, there is no reason to think that the democratic assumption could not ultimately offer one of the most useful tools in our revolutionary toolbox. So perhaps it is not time for the anarchists, but instead for the parliamentarians, to do away with their talk of democracy. Because, if anarchism cannot offer rule by the people, then really nothing can.

The Decline and Fall of the Protestant Empire. . .

“When God wills to punish a people or a kingdom, he takes away from it the good and godly teachers and preachers, and bereaves it of wise, godly, and honest rulers and counsellors, and of brave, upright, and experienced soldiers and of other good men.”

-Luther, Table Talk

“. . . it is a crisis both of capitalism but really of the underpinnings of the Judeo-Christian West in our beliefs.”

- Steve Bannon (advisor to Trump), speech at Vatican 2014

“The worst, most depraved form of Christianity. . . the hardest to refute. . . Protestantism!”

-Nietzsche, The Anti-Christ





THE RETURN OF THE NATION-STATE

Nationalism and the nation-state are making a come back. We know that these ideas never really went away but we were all meant to be living in a new, globalized world defined and ordered by transnational bodies like the IMF and the EU. The nation-state as a meaningful and powerful institution was believed to be an historical relic. The global neoliberal order which seemed to have us all convinced it was the only possible present and future has recently come under threat. Its advocates seem worried and confused, wondering how it has all started to go wrong and where the next blow might land. We longed to witness such scenes yet now we look on in despair as it is not a revolutionary movement from below that is shaking the established order but a reactionary return to the nation-state.

Trump, the proponents of Brexit and the various fascists and nationalists of Europe offer people an escape from the global capitalist

market by a return to the supposed safe haven of the nation-state and its borders. The promise is of course an illusion. Trump cares for no one but himself and the language used to promote Brexit, that Brussels is comprised of an out of touch, bureaucratic elite, could just as well be hurled at the government in London. But people hoping for an escape from the current order can see no other option than a step backwards to the days of the sovereign nation-state. This nostalgic look back is generally the way with declining powers but it means that ideas believed to be receding into history, nationalism and the nation-state, are coming to the fore again.

Therefore we will need to pick up and develop our critique of nationalism and see what alternatives we can pose. The general arguments against nationalism and the nation-state are well known. The nation-state takes one aspect of life, national or community identity, and elevates it to the single defining feature. Under this idea, if you have a certain national identity-defined by language, customs and a shared historical narrative, then you must form one single united political community. The divisions within that community are ignored, given only a secondary place or forcibly destroyed. On a practical level the unity over a society and territory that nationalism seeks to create means that there will always be one centre of power and therefore one elite to enjoy it.

As well as countering the right-wing movements sweeping the board these days we need to look at nationalism in order to develop our own ideas further. The process of creating nation-states was so successful that we still struggle to get out of the nationalist view of the world today. Alternatives to this world view have so far failed to break the hold of the nation-state, the world of the international proletariat collapsed some decades ago and the transnational capitalism of the international middle class citizen is under threat now. One reason why alternatives to nationalism have faltered is that in many places nationalism was able to turn its vision of what the population of the nation should be into a reality. Not so long ago many state territories were culturally and linguistically diverse but under the nation-states the national identity was taught and hammered home till a more homogeneous population came into existence.

One reason why revolutionary movements have so far struggled to break the state is that for most people they can not imagine a world not divided into nation-states. Even during a period when the state is failing, such as recently in Greece, most people could not conceive of breaking the state as this would break the nation. So rather than burning parliament and

creating new political communities they desperately hoped someone in the parliament would listen to them. Both the xenophobic nationalism of the right and the popular nationalism of the left are equally attached to this unity of the nation-state. Popular protests will never become true anti-state insurrections until we can break the link between the nation as a community with a need for a unified state.

History should be one line of attack against nationalism. It could perhaps be one of its weak points as nationalism and the nation-state rest on the use of history much more than other political ideologies. As nation-states were created each gave itself legitimacy by creating a view of the past which proved the nation's existence, longevity, special features and claims to territory. Such histories gave people something to believe in and allowed the division of the world into nation-states and the internal strengthening of each state in turn. The nationalists did not invent these histories, they simply looked at the past from their own point of view and turned a complex and multifaceted reality into a narrower national narrative. Links were sought to connect all the different societies that had inhabited a territory throughout time in order to forge a single, coherent national narrative for a people and place.

I suggest that looking into history and engaging with mainstream views of the past could be one way to break the hold of the nation-state, on an intellectual level at least. We can look back at the national historical narratives in each state and see which elements should be challenged and which may be useful for prompting revolutionary ideas. One possible advantage of this approach is that instead of just basing ourselves on general principles and abstract notions we can speak about specific historical examples and what they mean for the present. For example if you read material from or about the struggles in the Kurdish regions you see that general principles-democratic confederalism, ecology, feminism- are combined with and applied to Kurdish history and that of the wider region. We can reject all states and then move on to explain what it is about the history and reality of the Greek, British, French, etc, states that we reject and point out how they have failed or what could be different. It is perhaps better to try and engage with history in this way than to continue to leave this field of knowledge to the nationalists and conservatives.

As an example we can look at some of the historical narratives that underpin the Greek state. Not surprisingly the Greek state and modern Greek identity have a particularly close relationship to history. The Greeks

are meant to be the successors to the ancient society upon which the west puts its historical foundations. This idea is behind much of the justification for the Greek state- it is the return of the glory and liberty of ancient Greece- while at the same time it is behind much of the disillusionment with the state and Greece's place in the modern world- the disappointing reality of a small easily dominated state is not what people had in mind. The Greek national narrative begins with the ancient world, passes through the successive empires of Rome, Byzantium and the Ottomans and has so far reached the Greek state. Stress is laid on the continuity of Greek civilisation which goes back more than 3,000 years to the edge of recorded time. The modern state is meant to be seen as the deliver from foreign oppression and the projector of this historical continuity. The permanent presence of the Greek language from, almost, the earliest recorded time and the rhythms of daily life are used to mould these different historical societies into a single narrative of an eternal Greek presence and civilisation. This would seem to justify the conservative view of history and support the idea that Greece has always been for the Greeks and should remain so. Add to this the sense of superiority that such a long and distinguished history gives and it would seem there is little in this narrative for people who want a radical change of society.

However, the centuries of Greek history are an example of the academic cliché of continuity and change. During the last 3,000 years enough has stayed the same that it makes sense to speak of a continuous Greek presence but this civilisation has taken many radically different forms in that time. In broad terms the famous ancient world of city-states, philosophers and polytheism was replaced by the Christianity of a world empire which in turn gave way to a rival conquering empire before that was replaced in a limited territory by a nation-state. Reconciling all of these different changes into one national narrative has proven difficult. Admiring the ancient polytheistic past whilst remaining loyal followers of the Christian church can be tricky and has led some to describe the Greek national identity as a split personality.

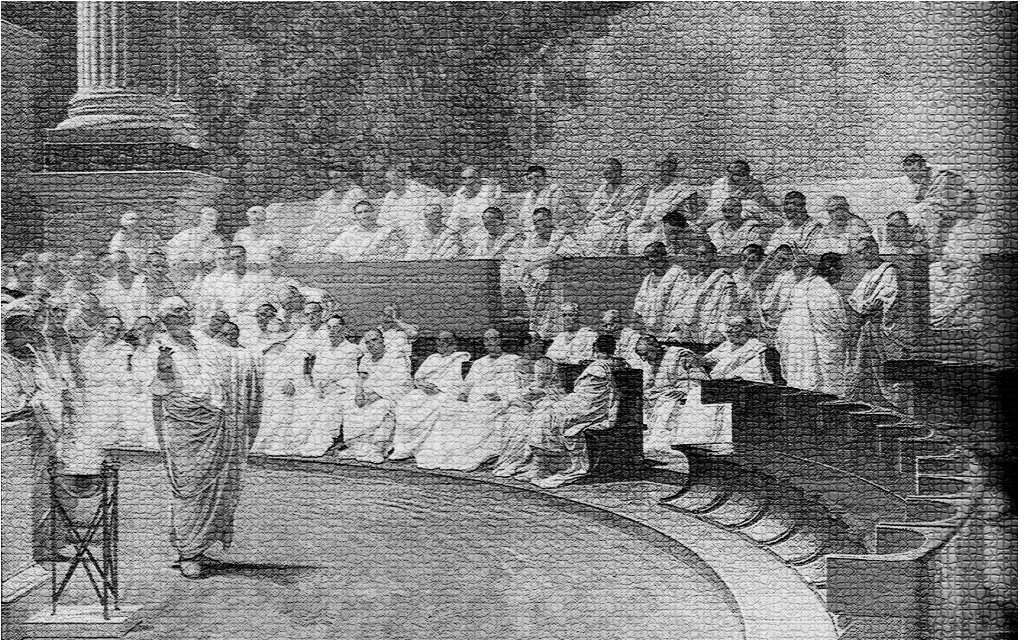
Encouragingly, we can see that this part of the national narrative demonstrates the fact that societies change greatly over time. National history jams together completely different societies in an effort to create a sense of unity and historical depth. Instead we should stress the differences between the various periods and forms of society to show that there is just as much change as there is continuity in any national narrative. From that

point we can show that another radical change in the form of society is only in keeping with the historical record. This line of argument can be used with all nation-states as any long established presence will have gone through several different forms of society and political arrangement. For example, while there has been something recognisable as France for more than a thousand years even just a century or two ago there were several 'nations', languages and cultures within what is now the French state.

The world of ancient Greece has aspects of interest to revolutionaries. Anyone on the political spectrum can find something they like in this period. Liberals like to point out that Greece is the birthplace of democracy while failing to see that there is no historical link between the ancient and modern systems. At the other end Golden Dawn like to think of themselves as modern Spartans, though it is not clear if they have actually read any history or just watched *300*. The recent direct democracy movements have also shown interest in the ancient world. However, it remains a period associated primarily with nationalism and fascism. A Greek nationalist may draw inspiration from ancient Greece and will certainly base claims for superiority on this period but the reality of the historical record does not fit easily into the nationalist view. In some ways ancient Greece fits into an anarchist world view better than the nationalist one.

The known facts about the historic populations of the Greek territories show a world anarchists would be happier with than nationalists. The single homogeneous heroic populations of nationalist myths rarely, if ever, existed. From as far back as we can know the Greek territory has always been home to a variety of populations. In the ancient world the Greek city-states neighboured a number of different groups. Around the mountains and coasts of the north and west were a number of tribes and kingdoms which while within a Greek cultural world were considered semi-foreign. For a long period of time this included the Macedonians, an aspect of ancient history with considerable impact on the Greek state's foreign policy today. The Greek communities themselves were divided up not just into politically independent cities but also into a number of other groupings such as Ionian and Dorian. The Ionian Athenians were one of the few Greek groups to claim that they sprang from the soil and were the ever-lasting inhabitants of their lands. In contrast the Dorians admitted that invasion and migration played a part in their story. It is not always clear what these various possible identities meant at different times but from our point of view there is enough there to show that the golden age of Greece was not produced by a single unified nation.

These facts hold true for much of subsequent history and could be used to alter people's view of the current society and its population. The Greek territories only became host to a remarkably homogeneous population around sixty or seventy years ago. What nationalists would like to see as an eternal and essential fact, a Greece of Greeks, is in fact a recent innovation. Viewed in this way the various waves of immigration into Greece in the last decades are more of a restoration of the previous situation than a new factor. For example an Albanian population had lived in Greek territories for many generations before the arrival of the Greek state, indeed many fought against the Ottomans to create it. The return of an Albanian immigrant population post-1990 only helps restore the pre-nationalist situation.



This point on population serves as a useful counter point to nationalist myths but of more interest to us is the decentralised nature of the Greek world during its golden age. The Greeks in their different forms could, and did, identify themselves as Greek in a similar way to how we see national identities today. Being born into a community which spoke Greek, in its different dialects, worshipped the Greek gods and followed Greek customs made someone Greek. An identity understood as distinct from the rest of the world. This common identity, however, in no way implied a political unity.

The Greek political unit was not the nation but the city-state. The Greek world was famously divided into numerous city-states, most of them not much bigger than a modern village, spread across the Mediterranean. These city-states could come together into various leagues and alliances and there were religious centres and festivals which demonstrated a pan-Greek feeling but there was never a united political nation as modern nationalism implies there has to be. This ancient world shows us that there does not have to be a link between a sense of identity and political centralisation.

This period of disunity was this territory's most productive and spectacular suggesting that the pursuit of unity through the state is undesirable and misguided. In many ways the success of this period was due to its disunity. The division of the land into many city-states meant that at any one time there was a variety of political systems in operation and communication. The religion was just as decentralised with stories and myths able to change from place to place without them being seen as false or dangerous. The complexity and diversity of this world is no doubt one of the key factors behind the high level of thought and philosophy that this time produced. Disunity served the Greeks well and significantly when some kind of unity was imposed, by the Macedonians, it marked the end of Greek liberty and its golden age. Using this example we can invert the usual nationalist story which says it is always better when different regions come together to form a unified whole.

We can use this part of mainstream history, its most famous and beloved period, to show that there is no need for a Greek state to guarantee the continued existence of Greeks as a people. Once we can show that different political forms and different forms of identity have existed then we can move on to judging our own world and help people to build new political identities not limited by national feeling. The ancient Greek world also gives us a view on what a future stateless world may look like. I'm not trying to suggest that the ancient Greek world was stateless, its fundamental unit was the *city-state* yet it shows that within a cultural area it is possible for a variety of political communities to exist. These communities sometimes cooperated and sometimes were in conflict and many of them operated on very different principles from their neighbours. If the nation-state breaks down we may well see the re-emergence of such a world with a cultural area split into different political communities.

We could even give this argument a rhetorical flourish. Feeling the need to live up to the elevated status of ancient Greece has imposed a heavy

burden on modern Greek identity and its ideas. When a past is as admired as ancient Greece it is impossible for any living reality to reach that standard. Yet the goal, trying to rediscover and renew the spirit of the ancient world is not necessarily bad and can perhaps even serve a revolutionary purpose. Restoring some of the better aspects of the ancient Greek world would mean destroying the nation-state and allowing a variety of political communities to flourish in its place. In this way anarchist revolution does not have to position itself as counter to all historical experience. Instead revolution can be shown as a way to reach an historical goal, such as a return of ancient Greece, whilst anarchist ideas and principles can help us avoid merely replicating a past period with all its many errors and injustices.

One side of the Greek national narrative can perhaps serve some purpose for us. However, in each national history there will be major elements which simply must be criticised and confronted. In Greek history the role of the Church is one such element. Nothing good can, or should, be said about the role of the Greek church in history and there is nothing in the history of this organisation that can be of help to revolutionaries. But the church takes a leading role in the national narrative and continues to be dominant today. The story goes that during the centuries when the Greek territories were under the Ottoman empire the Church preserved and protected Greek identity against its oppressors and when the time came it led the revolution against the Sultan. Much of this is simply myth. The Greek speaking church was a key part of the Ottoman administration and while Christians were a second-class group in a Muslim empire the church continued to be a rich landowner and upholder of the established order. Contrary to legend there were no secret schools where priests taught children their language and religion by candlelight and a visit to any of the monasteries of the period shows that the church was far-richer than much of its flock. When new ideas did emerge the Church was among the first to condemn them and they denounced the first revolutionaries for upsetting the established order.

In cases such as this we could try to use history to loosen the grip of the Church on Greek society. A basic point is that the Church was not always the defender and promoter of a Greek identity. In terms of identity the Christian period was as complex as any other and to an extant Christian and Greek (Hellene) were seen as two separate, and historically opposed, peoples. After almost 1,000 years of Roman rule the population of the territories had

gotten used to referring to themselves as Romans. Christianity tried to draw a sharp dividing line between the Christian Roman world and the polytheistic Greek world that came before it. After the long centuries as part of the Roman and Byzantine empires the population thought of themselves as Romans and it would be some time before they learnt to think of themselves as Greek. Leading figures at the time stressed that they were not Greek but Christian or Roman. These points on historical identity are somewhat academic but again serve the purpose of demonstrating the ever changing nature of identity over time. More immediate issue with the church are its entanglement in the corruption of the regime, e.g the Vatopedi scandal, and its overlap with Golden Dawn and the far-right.



When we arrive at the two centuries of the modern Greek state the historical record of this political system is perhaps the strongest argument for revolution in Greece. The history of the current political form of society should be used to criticise the status quo. Moving on from the leftist critique of the Greek state, that a right-wing state excluded and repressed leftists for

several decades, should be one of the goals of anarchist historical thought in Greece. This left wing critique of the Greek state is correct in its facts, the left had to struggle for a long time to be accepted as part of the state, but it is a phase that has passed. The left did eventually gain acceptance by the state and even came to rule it. This however did nothing to change the Greek state's fundamental character and failings. Clinging to such a view of history leads to strange cases of amnesia, such as SYRIZA's slogan of 'first time left'.

A serious question the anarchist movement can put to society is how much more time should the Greek state be given to prove that it can function as an effective form of society? It has existed in its different forms for nearly two hundred years now and has so far been unable to break out of a pattern of regular crisis. At best you can say that the state has provided for a few fortunate generations in its time. If you grew to adulthood during one of the relatively calm and stable periods of the state then you were lucky. The next generation however most likely faced either a coup, dictatorship, civil war, default or bankruptcy the effects of which would last a decade or two. By this point in time the Greek state has tried almost every form of regime-it has been monarchist, republican, liberal, neoliberal, far-right, fascist, centre left and right and it has now even tried the radical left. A political form that has shown such a pattern of failure over two centuries should not be long for this world. In some respect this is already admitted. Liberals frequently claim that the Greek state's attachment to the EU is necessary for it to stabilise and break free of its past. It is not extreme to question the wisdom of maintaining a political structure which has failed to establish itself securely and successfully after two centuries of attempts.

I have tried to give an example of how anarchists can approach mainstream historical narratives in light of the resurgence of nationalism. Of course, creating alternative histories will not on its own address the situation we find ourselves in. But we should remember that nation-states are not natural elements of the world that have always existed. Nation-states were an idea that got transformed into reality. They are a political form that was created and expanded over time not an ever present feature of the world. History gave a story and legitimacy to the nation-state builders. These stories about who people were and what they should do politically were just as important as the money and armies that forged the nation-states. Turning history against nation-states may help undermine them and prevent people from going back to a failed model as the world gets more unpredictable.

THE CONSPIRACY THEORY

“ 'The conspiracy theory of history' was in the 19th century a reactionary and ridiculous belief, at a time when so many social movements were stirring up the masses. Today's pseudo-rebels are well aware of this, thanks to hearsay or a few books, and believe that it remains true for eternity. They refuse to recognize the real praxis of their time. . . ”

-Debord,

Comments on the Society of the Spectacle (1988)

In provocation, timing is everything, along with a certain style and taste. Therefore I judge it a very good time to come up with a discussion that, it needs to be said, will not simply provoke for the sake of provocation, but provoke because there are things in our world of today that certainly are, as the phrase would have it, thought-provoking.

For instance, the threatened decommissioning of the 9/11 report by the Americans, and its apparent implications of the Saudi Arabian government, is surely something that would have been regarded as 'not acceptable for discussion' in some radical circles, even a few months ago, and yet, this is an undeniable recent fact. But once this comes out many will no doubt ask further questions about the help of other intelligence agencies, first of all, the Americans themselves, and secondly other close allies of the US, like the UK, Pakistan, Israel, and other Gulf monarchies. I think this bit of recent news is a good introduction to thinking about conspiracies, the conspiracy theory and its function in today's world.

To begin, there are basically two popular conceptions among radicals relating to conspiracy theories, and I would summarize them as 'too little' and 'too much'. For the first, these conspiratorial analyses are pooh-poohed in favor of “serious struggle” or it's assumed that they “don't matter anyways”. A slightly more Machiavellian conception would have it that such things *might* be true, but we can't discuss them openly for fear of offending or alienating the masses, and so they are unprofitable in this regard. But I also find problematic this last spuriously realistic view, as conspiracy theories, according to various studies, have at least some mass grounding in many societies; and anyways it assumes a sort of role of guiding the bland masses, which I find problematic. This even goes into censorship, and while it's not totally related, I read with interest an article from an aging Dutch Marxist¹, complaining about being silenced for his conspiratorial thoughts:

“However, people at NLR [New Left Review] and other publications are (too) keen to be recognised by the mainstream and are allergic to the faintest hint of ‘conspiracy theory’, as if the incidence of terror attacks would be all spontaneous and there would not have been an infrastructure in place which at least seeks to influence the conjuncture of terror.”

This comes about, in my view, not only from a certain 19th century standpoint of outdated ideas, but also because (in a related, typically Anglophone fashion) they have confused *respectability* with *popularity*. What is respectable in today's decomposing society (e.g. multiculturalism, identity politics, 'reasonable' denying of any conspiracy theory, austerity, neoliberal economics, electoralism etc.) *is not very popular at all*. If we are serious about trying to make some broader influence, we should not be limited by the all-too fragile search for respectability of the Marxists in academia. Actually, I truly believe that 'crazy anarchy' of burning cars and riots is much less respectable, but much more popular, than the (generally Anglophone) efforts to present things as if society could be reasonably talked into social revolution during a brief chat, providing we avoid some sensitive topics.

On the other hand, on the side of 'too much', we wind up in paranoiac paralysis (in the best case, if not spinning off into sighting UFOs, etc.). Because the modern State has quite a lot of power, it gets credited as having total control over all events, even those of an antagonistic political character. Then the smallest molotov or stone thrown becomes the work of provocateurs, and more proof of the hopelessness of resistance. Everything fits into the plans of the (depending on your taste, Masonic/Illuminati/Soros/NWO etc.) elite. This is basically where Debord wound up in his old age, and it's surely not an agreeable or very productive place to be. This represents mental defeat before the battle has even commenced, and becomes in this way a self-fulfilling prophecy.

But from these two views, wrong in different ways for their lack of moderation, I would hope to make a sort of synthesis between them, taking what is valuable and leaving what is not. With that said, let's begin our further research on this '*murky business*' of modern society.

Surely a basic analysis should come from the country that has mainly created the contemporary 'meme' of conspiracy theories, the US. If one

reads the conspiracy sites a bit, it's clear that this is something like the death agony of a certain way of life. Because sometimes these don't go in a clearly reactionary or traditionally 'right-wing' direction, and you can find a real opposing ideological grab-bag, as the arguments are often combined with a large degree of intellectual eclecticism, and this utopic free-market neoliberalism, this faith you can almost only find existing in the US (along with other outlandish beliefs like Mormonism, Scientology, etc.). This is sort of a local conservatism unsure of itself and intellectually confused, combined with some occasional pacifist/left/anti-imperialist influence.

There is also a great deal of nostalgia for some sort of constitutional rights and liberties (generally of the 2nd amendment variety). Generally though, most of the conspiracy websites (as far as I've seen) don't seem capable to resist Trump, which is a bit sad, as it seems that despite all their rhetoric, perhaps they just wanted a clumsy and irrational authority. This points to the highly American character of most conspiracies (after all the largest debates concern Sept. 11), and this makes sense, as everything nowadays is being Americanized. Whereas in the past, certain conspiracy theories were quite well-accepted amongst the Left (e.g. the Nazis burning the Reichstag and faking a Polish attack justifying their invasion of that country, or Castro's conspiratorial view of Kennedy's demise) while other opposing conspiracy theories (frequently anti-Semitic) were accepted amongst the far-right. In general we would find more historical reality in dividing such a large term by saying, "which supposed conspiracy, and what proposed theory?".

There are also more recent confirmed minor conspiracy theories that have some value- for instance, the rigging of the precious metals markets (LIBOR scandal, etc.) has geopolitical implications, in regards to gold as a denominator of currency (the free-floating US dollar, against the recently gold-backed Chinese yuan). Wikileaks, in regards to the NSA (and recently the CIA), has confirmed a lot of what has been thought about capacities for gathering intelligence from computers and cell phones. So too, with the ongoing cycle of supposed tawdry revelations about Trump, these reveal both something believable about Trump, but also the truly hypocritical, deeply sick Puritan mindset of the American intelligence agencies. So, these are just a few examples, and they are not so controversial. It serves to reason as, after all, what is rotten at the top must be rotten beneath, and so too, what is rotten at its foundation, can't be stable at its height. As Debord wrote, concerning the growth of assassinations and conspiracies in his time:

“The syndrome of this newly established social disease has spread quickly, as if, following the first documented cases, it moved down from the summits of the state (the traditional sphere for such crimes) and at the same times moved up from the lower depths, the other traditional locale for trafficking and protection rackets, where this kind of war has always gone on between professionals. These activities tend to meet up in the middle of social affairs, a place where the state was prepared to frequent and which the Mafia was pleased to reach; thus a kind of confluence begins.”

I suppose some might be asking, what practical relevance does this all have? For myself, it would be something like a call to concretely evaluate every large event, not simply believing or disbelieving it. It would be something like the sharpening of a strategic understanding. And to avoid extremes: I would hope that in a radical space given over to dismissing any conception of conspiracy, this article could point to at least a few interesting facts of recent times; in a radical space given to endless paranoid analysis, that this could serve as a call to more healthy and practical actions, as a sort of “yes, and what of it?”. So too, in speaking of its middle character, we might say that many of the spectacular terror events, are probably not tele-guided or fabricated, but allowed to happen. I mean that a plot is hatched by various people with many 'red flags' going up, they are watched, but on the day of the event, there is also a massive simultaneous simulation of a terrorist attack, or a strange malfunction in the computer systems, and they pass to action. Perhaps the old society is like Winston in 1984, who still assumes the rockets landing from time to time were authentic, whereas the younger and more worldly Julia, assumes they are sent by the Party itself.

But again, and here I would agree with many, the real critique and overcoming of the conspiracy theory would be saying that, whether believing or skeptical, this should not function as some sort of article of faith, where we join the elect or the impure, depending on the view. I suppose of actual value is simply the realization that the old method of politics, and a certain softness that went with it, have gone out the window. “Gentlemen don't read each others' mail” indignantly exclaimed an American statesman in the 1930's, when these tactics began to be applied in a general way. But nowadays, the NSA has been spying on everyone's mail and phones for years. The most worrying is the realization that in modern society, the secret police and repressive skills inherited from the totalitarian

regimes of the 20th century, have now ensconced themselves behind the diffuse veils of parliament, social-democracy, legality, the media and academia, consumerism, etc.

And I suppose to realize that the integrated spectacle, or in its organizational terms, *the mafia-state*, comes more and more to makes its appearance, as the modern State begins to collapse back into its origins, one band of robbers among others. The growth of conspiracy theories are quite obviously correlated to the growth of official conspiracies, reeds that shoot up from this swamp of decay; and these two symptoms, are in their turn just part of the larger lack of reason and meaning in a dying, irrational and decadent society. *“Society can no longer be governed strategically”*. Far from being a proof of the omnipotence of the modern state, some all-too real conspiracies and their all-too muddled theories in their own way, merely attest to its fatal sickness. This is how the Emperors of today (like those of the past) to cure this malady, only make it worse, by drinking a false alchemical medicine, full of arsenic and mercury. For a good example, the only 'classical' power further back in the past that flirted with such devious tentatives, Romanov Russia, collapsed in military defeat and popular revolution. *Let's have this be the image and thought we end on, to close our thinking about conspiracies, what they signify, and where they lead. . .*

Endnotes

1 <http://www.versobooks.com/blogs/2602-social-democracy-has-been-exhausted-kees-van-der-pijl-on-marxism-barbarism-and-prospects-for-left-renewal>



SOME THESES ON NEO-FASCISM AND THE STATE OF EXCEPTION

§ The present convergence of parliamentary democracy, establishment media, neoliberal practices, anti-terrorist laws, social conformity, and cultural exhaustion, all lead to a societal formation greatly resembling that of the totalitarianism of the prior century. These uncomfortable facts can no longer be swept away or not dealt with. No one can deny the new phenomenon that is emerging, and the necessity to deal with it.

§ The present has characteristics like the fascism of the past, although it differs from it to a large degree. It would aid our conception far more to glance back at what was seen as a forerunner to fascism. That is, the early modern world of absolute monarchy, the inquisition, counter-Reformation and Jesuits. The difference with today is that the prior divine right of the sovereign in executing justice, to end or save life, is now found transmitted to every cop. The inquisition against free thoughts and heresies is now largely devoted to certain practices which are then defined as heretical acts, e.g. terrorism. Although as before with the Nazis, the police demand a terror of their own to fight terrorism. The Jesuitical aspect of mainstream branches of economics, and academia more broadly (so we can include the Left as well), is quite obvious.

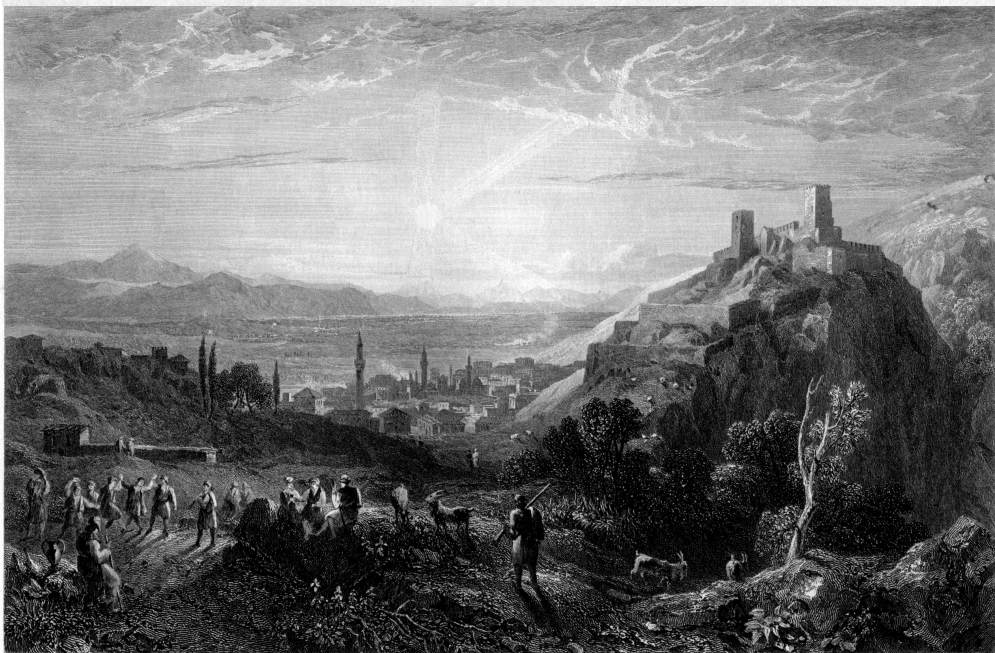
§ Just as the Socialists had sent the workers to the slaughter of 1914, and later worked against and violently suppressed the post-war revolutions—this earning them the analysis as social-fascist from the 3rd International—so too, what remains of the Left of today works to establish and justify the permanent *state of exception that grounds the new authoritarianism*. Obvious cases like Hollande or Obama should not have anyone overlook certain generals in Podemos, nor the normalization of far-right discourse under Syriza-Anel (along with a truly shameful statement opening up to the Nazis of Golden Dawn if they became peacable) and the implementation of new anti-terror practices clearly targeting family members of political prisoners.

§ The *state of exception* is the mechanism and institutional reality by which the new fascism can become a reality in a short time. Although when this last arrives, it will not be with stormtroopers, as in the classic view, but much more with elections, or even just the signing of a few pieces of paper. When it becomes evident, it is already too late- and thus a primary axis of political action in our times must be directed *against the state of exception and its neoliberal and anti-terrorist ideology*.

§ The paradigm of counter-insurrectionary cleansing by the new authoritarianism is of course, the crackdown in Italy beginning in 1979: all purely done in a legal framework, and sanctioned by the Left. Thousands of activists were arrested in a few large sweeps, and many thousands more forced into exile. The goal is the accomplishing of what the old fascism did (smashing radicalism, large transfer of wealth to the rich), but in a controlled and legalistic manner.

§ The other great counterpart to the state of exception, is the legitimization of the Left under the banner of an endless 'lesser-evil' argument, as well ending in an engineered 'transition to democracy' or 'reconciliation'. Of course this will only become a reality after the social threat has been dismantled. This cleansing is sort of like some switch-on it will go until society is remolded into ever more atomized neoliberal forms, then the sterilized, preprogrammed consumerist parliamentary democracy, now free of its small malfunctions, can return in all its splendour.

§ These theses are not meant to be the last word, but the beginning of a larger debate about the disastrous course of events unfolding. . .



ORCHOMENOS

“...καὶ εἴ ποθεν ἄλλα γένοιτο, οὐδ’ ὅς’ ἐς Ὀρχομενὸν ποτινίσεται. .”

“...Not for all the gold of Orchomenos. .”

-Iliad, IX, 380

So claims Achilles, continuing his quarrel with Agamemnon. And so by reason of curiosity, if one were necessary, I arrived on a trip by bicycle at the ancient and venerable *Orchomenos*, now just a small town in Boiotia, where once long ago had been wealth and finery, grandeur and gold. If anyone ever wanted to ruminate upon a vanished and now unattainable splendour, they could only do so with honesty in Greece, this land of majestic ruins. In my Pausanias, I open and read, “. . .Orchomenos, as famous and glorious as any city in Greece. . .The treasure-house of Minyas is one of the greatest wonders of Greece and of the world.” Nothing, in general, is more striking, poignant and melancholic than the *mediocrity of the present time*, and nowhere does it strike the eye more than in Greece. Moreover only here do

we have a certain loftiness of view, that allows us to overlook the comparatively recent and unhappy ruins of the Middle Ages, or even the functional solidity of Imperial Roman achievements. Greece, in this sense, is the oldest and most meaningful of palimpsests in the book of universal history.

Orchomenos in its emergence in the Mycenaean times had once been a grand citadel, full of wealth and culture due to its wisdom and technical prowess- they had successfully drained the nearby marshes and set to agriculture, thus reclaiming rich land that never before existed, in the proper Faustian manner. Long afterwards this Kopaic lake had a recurring history during breakdowns of civilization of reverting once more to marsh and then being drained once again-most recently by a French engineering society at the turn of the 20th century. . .

As you enter the place, it is undistinguished and even unwelcoming, with some Neo-Nazi graffiti here and there, and all the appearance of a sleepy small village, barely meriting the name of town. Proceeding past the small square and its minor provincial bustle, the κάρπειο with its old men drinking a morning coffee and clacking worry beads, and the bakery full of older women wearing black, you very soon find yourself at the quiet outskirts, and there is the old theatre, along with scattered columns and votary tablets, and of course the ancient circular *tholos* tomb, substantially as it was described by Pausanias almost 2,000 years ago, with the admirable and disinterested objectivity of the ancient world, that contrasts so favorably with the Bible.

A Byzantine Church across the way, nestled amidst old pines and quite old in its own right, has a strange aura of calm, and upon closer inspection, is studded with ancient columns and inscriptions- here indeed we must assume, on this very spot, in a grove of broken shafts of sunlight very much like the present one, was the foremost shrine of *the Graces*, the *χαριτες* of the Ancient world: *Aglaia*, *Thalia*, and *Euphrosyne*, these deities who could give polish and delicacy to all things. Just a few minutes walk away to the start of the neighbouring fields, the small spring, once dedicated to these ancient Graces, now a concrete fountain littered with bottles, plastic, and every conceivable kind of modern trash, and moreover covered over with old leaves. This, then, is truly emblematic of our modern era:

*“These are the labours of tovarisch,
that tovarisch lay in the earth,
and rose, and wrecked the house of the tyrants
and that tovarisch then lay in the earth,
And the χαριτες bent over tovarisch. . .
tovarisch cursed and blessed without aim. . .
Saying: Me, Cadmus sowed in the earth. . .
Nothing I build, and I reap
Nothing”*

And now to the long procession of ruins in the world, such as those bourgeois buildings that for Benjamin were already built as ruins, in our melancholy days have also been added those of the proletariat. Yet in some strange way, as divined in the poem, revolution is indeed associated with these ancient Graces, although in a most curious and esoteric manner: Revolution (as the Russian comrade, 'tovarisch') has, in some fashion, a lineage of the ancient world, so that the ageless Graces weep over it, and its evanescent and Cadmean victories over the tyrants of the earth- this, even as all things seem to be sinking into generalized societal ruin like unto Late Antiquity. . .

But these are only sad reflections, stirred and then dispelled by a gentle morning wind in the pines. The friendly guide at the site, who seems as if he meets no one there (at this minor wonder of the world) lets me go in for free (such, it should be noted, is the level of hospitality even today) and as I'm leaving, tells me the best way to the next town on my route. The rising sun at my back, a few sips of water, and now some more kilometers to cycle. . . I never can exactly describe this feeling I have in the Greece of today, and perhaps the closest one could get, is just with some picturesque thoughts. . .

*The tomb of Hesiod, reputed to be in Orchomenos, is still not found. . .
In Antiquity, a noted group of statues on the Acropolis was of these Graces.
None other than the famous Socrates was reputed as the sculptor. . .
Plato was once asked by a philosophic friend for his advice about life-*

“Sacrifice to the Graces,” he replied.



ANARCHO TOURIST REVIEWS

Steven Best, *The Politics of Total Liberation: Revolution for the 21st Century*

Published in English, by Palgrave Macmillan

November 2014

One of the most distinctly contemporary trends in the global anarchist movement today is the inclusion by many of green concerns, such as animal rights and ecology, into its revolutionary agenda. Compared, for example, with Marxism and liberalism, anarchism can be credited as the first political movement to take the issue of nonhuman oppression seriously. However, whilst this point is demonstrated most clearly by the new forms of activism that have emerged during the last few decades, the theoretical corpus backing up those on the ground remains seriously wanting. This contribution by Best – one that I think deserves both significant acclaim as well as criticism – can be identified as a key attempt to remedy this shortcoming.

The first chapter – 'The Animal Standpoint' – is one that really stands out, and that in my opinion goes as far as pushing the boundaries of modern political thought. Whilst approaches such as Marxism and feminism have demonstrated the need to include the importance of marginalized human groups into a comprehensive reading of history, the idea behind Animal Standpoint Theory is to establish that nonhuman animals, too, have played a profound role in shaping the development of human culture. More specifically, Best advances the thesis that “the domination of human over nonhuman animals underpins the domination of humans over one another and the natural world”. This claim is not really a novel one, but, whilst it has remained something of a hunch for many, the approach pioneered here grants it an unprecedented deal of argumentative force.

Supporting his thesis, Best provides a number of historical examples of how speciesism – the moral exclusion of members of other species based on the mere fact that they are different – has significantly facilitated the emergence of practices such as imperialism, war, slavery, and genocide. For one, it was only with the advent of the agricultural revolution that such practices began to occur, and perhaps this is no coincidence. Without the onset of animal husbandry, it may well have been impossible to develop the

wealth and tactics necessary to sustain foreign aggression. To give one supporting example from many, it is argued that, without the prior domestication of the horse (something that supposedly had not previously been done), it would have been impossible for the Kurgan people to expand beyond the Ukraine and subdue its neighbours in around 4400BC – arguably the very event that ended millennia of largely peaceful coexistence in the rest of Europe.

Historical approaches such as these are also mixed with more conceptual strategies for identifying the inseparability of human and animal oppression. For example, throughout history oppressors have dehumanized various human groups – such as people of colour, women, and the disabled – as a basis for morally excluding them. Just as Nazis and colonialists characterized their victims as subhumans, and sexists often imagined that women were irrational, this reoccurring dynamic has often been at play when such associations have had the gravest consequences. If, however, the oppressors had not held the prior assumption that species membership is a morally relevant trait, such moves would surely have been largely inconsequential. This suggests that speciesism has also played a crucial conceptual role in facilitating some of the most quintessential forms of social cannibalism.

Before moving on, it is worth emphasizing just how antagonistic Best's overall thesis that speciesism was the first form of domination, and that all others stem at least partially therefrom, is towards established radical political theory. It flies in the face of Marxian dogma stating that class was the original form of domination and that all others were built thereupon. It is also equally abrasive towards Bookchin's seemingly more developed claim that things like gerontocracy, theocracy, and patriarchy came first, and that it was only once human domination was established that the domination of nature became possible. Despite the pervasiveness of these approaches, Best provides convincing arguments to think that the deeply hierarchical society we see today is significantly rooted in animal slavery – in humans dominating animals rather than humans dominating each other (and once this point is accepted really the entirety of established politics has to be reconsidered).

Another chapter that I found especially pioneering was the fifth – 'Minding the Animals'. This one, slightly less political in flavour, centres on the thesis that recent scientific developments have falsified the most common reasons for believing that homo sapiens are obviously superior or

unique compared to other forms of life. Best claims, in a move akin to some contemporary discourses on race and gender, that the notion of humanity as a rigidly distinct biological or psychological category is actually somewhat fictitious. All of the supposedly most distinctive human characteristics, he argues, are possessed, if only in a nascent form, by plenty of nonhuman animals. Backing this up, he is in no short supply of examples that demonstrate the mental, emotional, and moral richness of nonhuman life, many of which are also quite novel. Particularly memorably, he notes that, if intelligence is to be regarded as the capacity to adequately adapt to one's environment and promote long-term survival, we are surely one of the stupidest species ever to exist.

Irrespective of his laudable feats, however, Best should also be criticized on a couple of important points. Beyond some chapters that can be pretty repetitive and tangential, it is a shame that this book offers such a misleading account of the relationship between animal liberation and anarchism. Despite arguing that both capitalism and the state should be abolished, he never explicitly adopts an anarchist outlook, and also says things that suggest that he thinks anarchism is best avoided. To claim, for example, that anarchists have been just as bigoted towards nonhuman animals as other radicals is simply untrue. Even if animal liberation remains absent from the works of the best known theorists, there is no ignoring its wholehearted adoption by others such as Élisée Reclus, Brian Dominick, and Bob Torres. Nor can we brush over the militant direct action tactics of groups like the Animal Liberation Front, or the fact that, in more northern countries at least, you can nowadays hardly find an anarchist event that does not offer vegan food. Finally, the fact that the very notion of total liberation emerged from anarchist subcultures is also not something that should be forgotten.

Finally, Best should also be criticized for having hardly anything to say on the topic of earth liberation. Whilst this book is saturated with discussions of the importance of animals, and also includes an emphasis on the increasingly terrifying prospect of global environmental catastrophe, less than a page towards the end is dedicated specifically to the political status of ecosystems. Moreover, he even contradicts himself on the matter, claiming at certain points that sentient life should be the locus of the moral community, whilst nonetheless endorsing biocentrism elsewhere – the view that all forms of life, sentient or not, are both equally and intrinsically valuable. Seeing as total liberation is typically conceived as anarchism

combined with animal and earth liberation, such confusion represents a serious flaw.

To sum up, then, even if Best might not offer the final say on the matter, the issues brought up here are in serious need of consideration. It can be quite thrilling – and not to mention timely! – to imagine a global revolutionary movement capable of uniting the struggles against capitalism and the state with those centred on animal rights and ecology. Those interested in green issues should be discussing radical politics, just as leftists of every stripe should be scrutinizing their tacit commitments to anthropocentrism. Hopefully this book can encourage the process, and maybe even convince some of our comrades that there are better conclusions to such conversations than souvlaki.

Voices from the Syrian Revolution
Hourriya pamphlet series
2016

A pleasing role is to introduce works that are highly interesting, and yet not as well known as they might be. Here we have a good example: this series of interviews and commentary from some radical activists who lived through the Syrian revolution has a great deal of thought-provoking material. It is, as also should be said, in a very tastefully designed format, at small price and offers stimulating reading for a lazy afternoon or a rainy day. Therefore it is an excellent example of tasteful and non-commercial form, meeting radical content.

The basic discussion concerns the retrospective views of some Syrian anarchists and what they lived through in the times of the initial uprising against Assad and its slow mutation into the disastrous situation of today. Nothing could be more interesting and of more value to revolutionists than first-hand accounts of uprising and revolt, of what went wrong and what went right. And, if I may summarize, while the specific situation in 2011 Syria was not one that resembled life in postmodern Europe, it does have a great deal to tell us, both as warning and as an example. For instance, the commentators note that, in a general way (just like radicals most everywhere), they lacked much organization at a coherent local and larger national level, and that publications and transmissions were a basic means

to that end, but this nucleus of organization arrived as the saying has it, too little, too late.

Thus, we read to find out: *what happens in a situation of uprising?* People take to the streets, and are perhaps gassed, shot or killed-and if things are to continue, they still take to the streets. There are some good comments about the lack of strategic direction and repetitiveness in some of the protests (just symbolic demonstrations in some provincial cities, instead of perhaps converging on Damascus or making more profound local initiatives). Finally, after enough time in this chaotic situation, local lawless elements and a few politicized groups begin to shoot at the police, and these are withdrawn or collapse when it becomes no longer safe for them. The army then is called up to surround the rebellious city or parts of it. Then the question becomes one of breaking a seige- bringing in food, making barricades, living life in that way. *What to do now?*

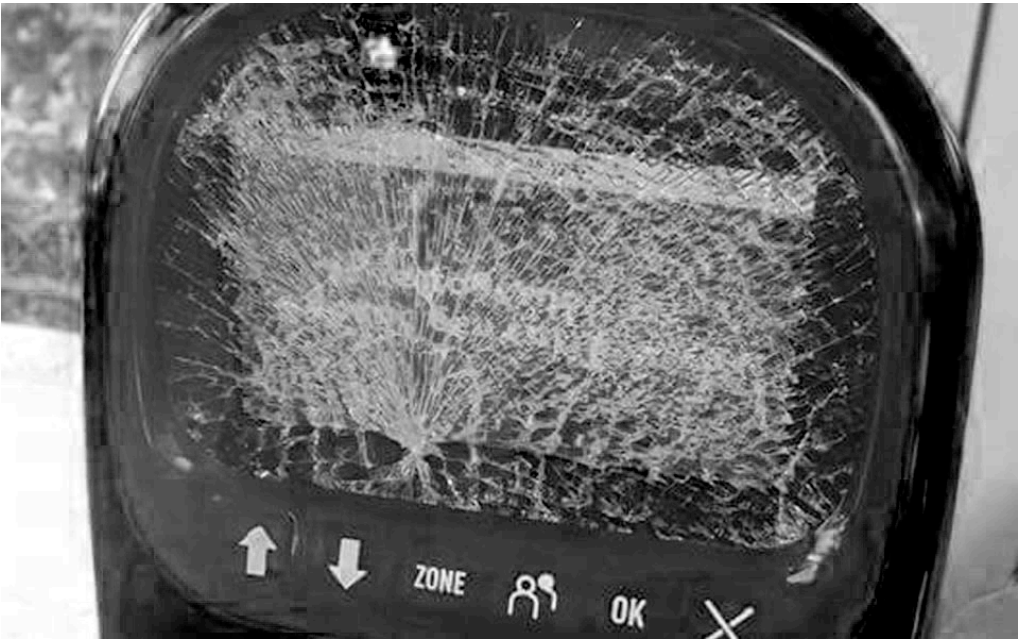
The problem with this revolution, as with so many others, was that the eventual militarization and increasingly sectarian-religious character of the conflict (promoted by the Islamic opposition militants and Assad regime, this sort of intriguing, mutually beneficial conspiracy theory which the authors confirm firsthand) led to the gradual loss of its liberatory political character (at least in relation to the Arab parts of the country). The society, disorganized and unable to deal with the army, eventually had to turn to 'the men with the guns', who became in larger and larger proportion as the conflict advanced, (largely Sunni and externally funded) fundamentalist groupings. And as in so many other historical examples (like Spain in 1936) these militaristic groups not merely destroy the revolution, but also lose the civil war with their conventional and unimaginative tactics, as seems to be the case in Syria after the fall of Aleppo.

Therefore, this pamphlet cannot be recommended more highly as concrete historical and strategic lessons, which we ignore at our peril. The compiler of these interviews has some interesting and worthwhile thoughts they add at the end, noting how silly it is to have some sort of doctrinaire checklist in our head of 'what is or is not a revolution'- and the generally uninterested or even dismissive attitude of many towards the Arab Spring revolts in Europe. Let's lose this ideological focus of abstract negation and really begin some serious empirical work- *what will happen if the control of the police is dissolved? How to deal with a seige, and the reliable units of the army? What does revolution mean and imply in the context of today?*

Only when we begin to think in this manner, making careful study of as many different situations as possible where the state is shaken, both in past and recent history, can we really begin to get dangerous in a concrete manner- and this is precisely the value of experiences like those shared in this work. After all, *“If you know your enemy, and know yourself, you can fight a hundred battles, and never once will you be in danger.”*

Note:

As well at some point will arrive a new collection of English translations of texts from Revolutionary Struggle. These will be valuable reading, demonstrating the contemporary reality of a revolutionary anarchist political line, especially under the Syriza era: no truce with the left government, critique of political maneuvers like referendums, openness to pragmatic alliances amongst a broad spectrum of radical forces, and clearly stated political positions.



THE ANARCHO TOURIST REVIEW

